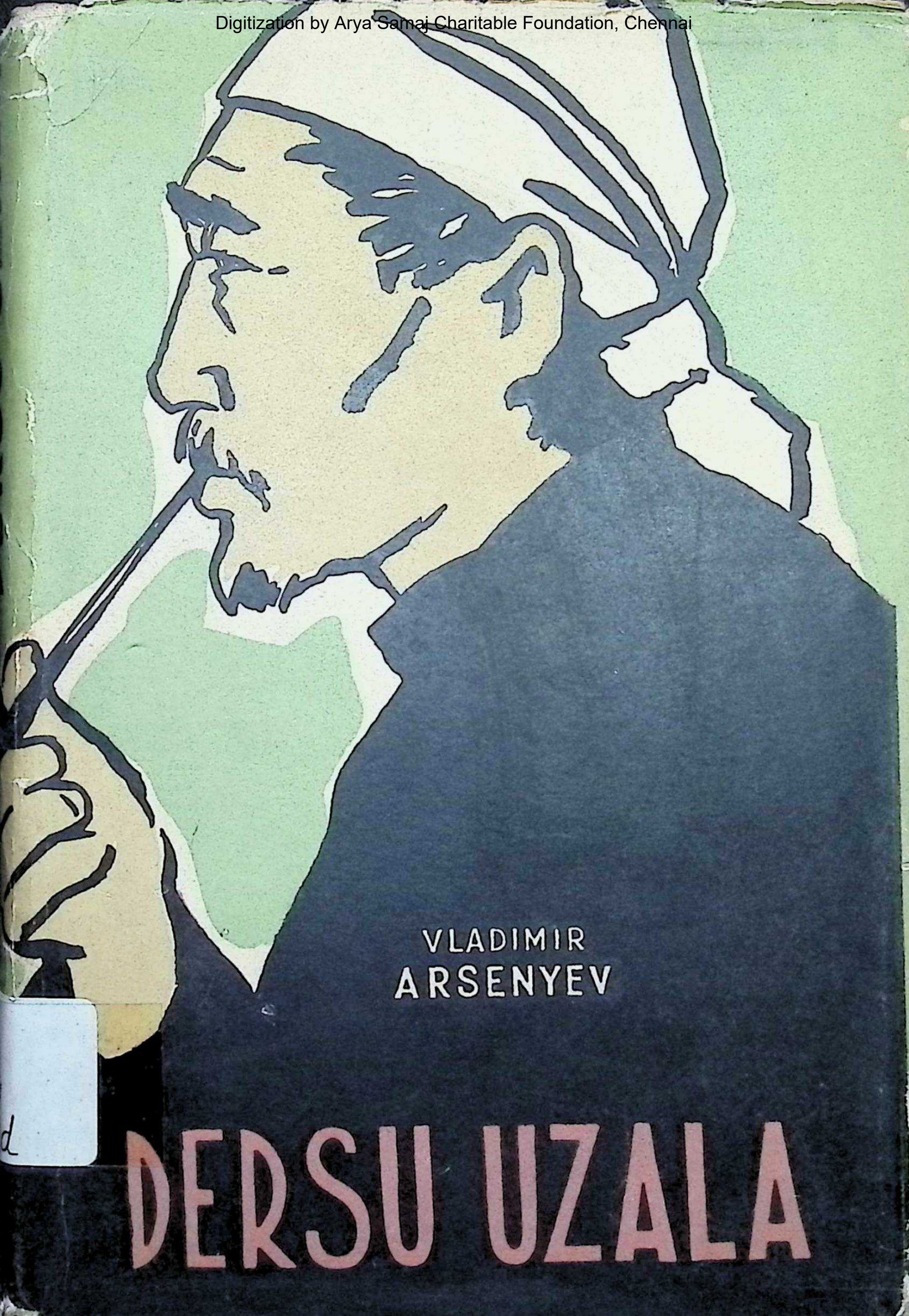

VLADIMIR
ARSENYEV

# DERSU UZALA

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Two men in a blinding blizzard, stranded upon a tiny scrap of firm land amidst deadly swamps. The searing gale knocks them off their feet, snow powders their scantily-covered backs, the biting wind cuts their faces.

They must erect a grass shelter. That is their only hope of salvation. But they are on their last legs, spent by stubborn battle against the raging elements.

"So that is how people freeze to death"—flashes across their feverish minds.

Then a desperate shout rises above the howling of the storm:

"Listen, captain! We must work very quick. If not——we die."

Who are these men? What are they doing in the taiga, that realm of tigers, the kings of the ranges?

They are V. Arsenyev, head of an expedition to the Ussuri Territory, and his guide Dersu of the clan of Uzala, the daring hunter and pathfinder. The taiga holds no secrets for him. It is his home. The tracks of birds and animals, the noises and smells of the forest—to Dersu they are an open book. They show him the way he must choose, and give warning of lurking dangers.

Big-hearted Dersu saves Arsenyev's life on more than one occasion. He helps the expedition out of numerous desperate situations. And it is to Dersu that Arsenyev dedicates this true story of his two Ussuri expeditions of 1906 and 1907.

The book abounds in exciting adventure and holds a wealth of fascinating facts about the taiga and its denizens. It tells about the terrible Ussuri tiger, the bloodthirsty panther, the brown bear, and the stately deer.

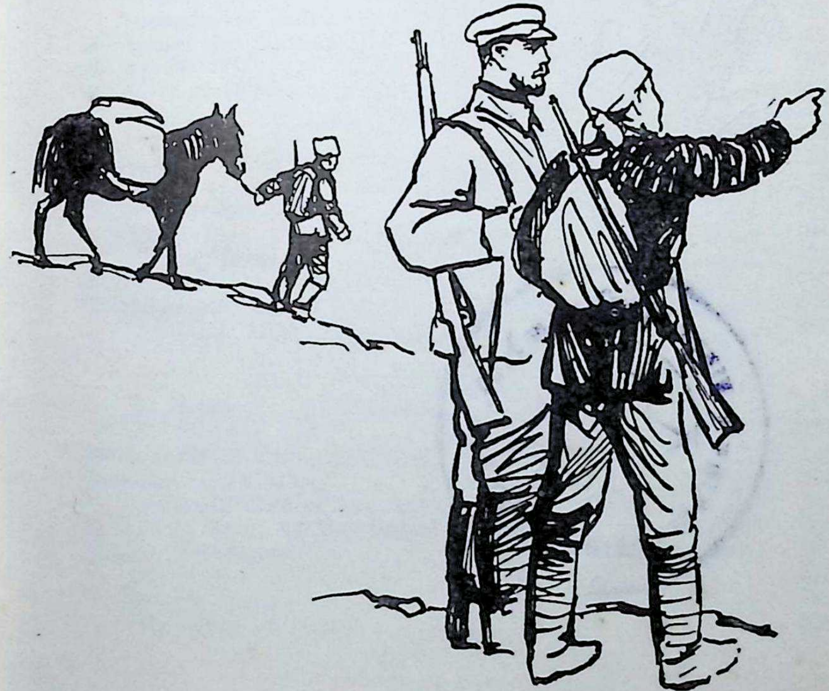
The story of Dersu inspires a sense of love for the backwoods, the deep rivers and the blue hills of the Ussuri Territory.

SOVIET LITERATURE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

*Foreign Languages*
PUBLISHING HOUSE
MOSCOW

VLADIMIR ARSENYEV

# DERSU UZALA



В. К. АРСЕНЬЕВ

# ДЕРСУ УЗАЛА

TRANSLATED FROM THE RUSSIAN
BY V. SHNEERSON

ILLUSTRATED AND DESIGNED
BY V. ALEXEYEV

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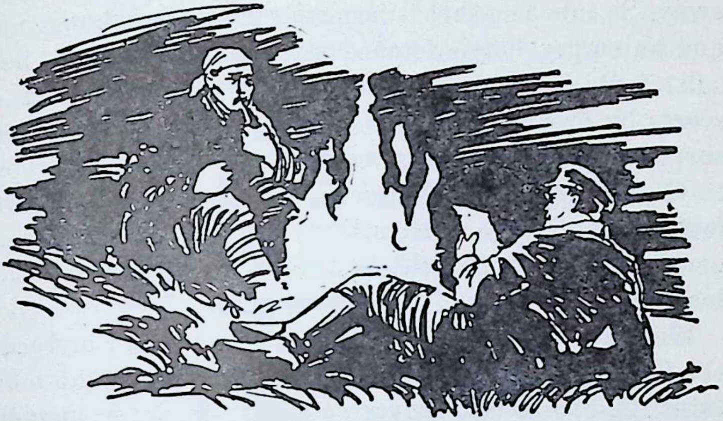
# PART ONE



# 1. NOCTURNAL VISITOR

IN 1902 I LED A CREW of six Siberian riflemen and four pack-horses up the Tsimuho, which drains into Ussuri Bay near the village of Shkotovo. Our purpose was to explore the passes over the Tatianshan, the source of four rivers—the Tsimu, Daubi, Mai and Lefu—and the trails in the neighbourhood of Lake Hanka and the Ussuri Railway.

Shkotovo stands at the mouth of the Tsimuho, on its right bank, in a valley known to local settlers as "Glass Coomb" after a Chinese hunting lodge that boasted a small glass window-pane. Glass was scarce in these Ussuri backwoods, the nearest glass factory being thousands of miles away. So much so that it became a kind of exchange unit, and an empty bottle fetched sizeable premiums of flour, salt, foxtail millet and even furs. Enemies settled old scores by breaking each others' glassware. It was hardly surprising under the circumstances that the glass pane in the window of a Chinese fanza* had so captured the fancy of the early settlers that, devoutly, they gave its name to the lodge itself, to the river, and to the entire locality.

We made an early start from Shkotovo and arrived at the Glass Coomb the same day. Higher up in the mountains the sparse oak groves gave way to dense, predominantly cedar, forests. We followed a narrow footpath laid by Chinese trappers and medicine hunters. Fallen into disuse, it had deteriorated. A grass carpet hid it from view, and in many places it was blocked by uprooted timber. Soon we lost it altogether, and looked for animal paths, which we followed as long as they led in the desired direction. For the most part, however, we made our way through virgin forest, reaching the Tatianshan shortly before nightfall on the third day.

As usual, I called an early halt, so that we could pitch our tents and gather fire-wood in the daylight. The men made camp, while I inspected our immediate surroundings. My constant companion on jaunts of that kind was Policarp Olentyev, a splendid chap and a fine hunter.

The sun sank below the horizon. Its rays lingeringly caressed the mountain peaks, but black shadows already veiled the dales. The tree-tops with their yellowish foliage stood out boldly against the pale sky. There was a hint of autumn in the air, in the way the birds looked, and the insects, and in the sallow dryness of the grass.

---

* *Fanza*—a Chinese hut-like dwelling. Its windows are of rice paper.—*Tr.*

We scaled a low ridge and descended into the neighbouring valley, thickly wooded and cut by the wide parched bed of a mountain stream. Here we parted ways. I turned left along the pebbled river-bed, and Olentyev went right. Not two minutes had passed when a sudden shot rang out, and I turned in time to catch a glimpse of something lithe and mottled flashing through the air. Olentyev was hurriedly reloading. The cartridge jammed, however, and the lock would not shut.

"What was it?" I asked, running up to him.

"A tiger, I reckon," he replied. "Up in that tree. I think I've hit it."

At long last Olentyev extracted the jammed cartridge, reloaded, and we advanced cautiously to the spot where the beast had taken cover. Blood-stains in the dry grass showed that it had really been hit. Suddenly Olentyev stopped in his tracks, listening intently. We heard a snort to our right, but the dense bracken shut out the view.

The bulky trunk of a fallen tree lay in our way. Olentyev was on the point of climbing over it, but, forestalling him, the wounded animal broke cover and hurled itself headlong over the trunk. The hunter fired point-blank, without so much as raising the rifle to his shoulder—and with excellent result. The bullet struck the beast in the head. The animal fell across the tree-trunk, head and forelegs on one side of it and hindquarters on the other. It jerked convulsively several times and bit the earth. Its body slid gently forward, then tumbled heavily at the hunter's feet.

It was a Manchurian panther, locally known as a *bars* —a magnificent specimen of the cat family. It was four feet seven inches long from nose tip to the root of its tail. Its fur, the colour of rust on the sides and back, and white on the belly, was spotted black, the spots ranged in rows like the stripes of a tiger. Solid and small on the sides, paws and head, they were large and ring-shaped on the neck, back and tail.

The panther occurs in the southern regions of the Ussuri Territory. It feeds principally on spotted deer, wild roes and pheasants. Crafty and cautious, it hides from man in the foliage, choosing a branch that points against its tracks, and, consequently, in line with the hunter's range of vision. The beast lies motionless, stretched along the branch, head on paws, conscious that its body is less conspicuous from the head than from the side.

It took more than an hour to skin the panther, and we set out for camp in semi-darkness. It was a long walk before we finally sighted the lights of our bivouac. Soon we glimpsed the figures of the men among the trees. They moved to and fro, and kept coming between us and the campfire. The dogs gave us a boisterous welcome. The riflemen crowded round our trophy, giving voice to mingled exclamations of surprise and admiration.

Next day we pushed on. Our route lay across land littered with wind-fallen trees, which greatly retarded our progress. At about four we came to a mountain peak. I climbed it, leaving behind our little caravan, and had a look round. What I saw instantly dispelled my doubts. The dome-shaped mountain was the very place we were looking for.

When I rejoined my crew the sun hung low over the horizon and we had to step lively and look for water, sorely needed by men and horses. The descent, gradual at first, soon became steep. The horses slid down on their

haunches. Their packs slipped forward, and would surely have tipped over their heads if it had not been for the breeching. We descended in zigzags, which was far from easy, considering the profusion of fallen timber.

The terrain at the foot of the mountain was extremely rugged. Deep gullys, piled to the brim with uprooted trees, ravines and moss-grown cliffs had a strikingly Walpurgian effect. I have never seen a more desolate and more unfriendly spot.

Sometimes the mountains and forests look gay and attractive: there is then the sense of never wanting to leave them. At other times they are sullen and bleak. Strangely enough, these impressions are never personal, of just one of a party. They are usually shared by all. It was like that now. There was a sickening air of gloom about us, frightening and repellent, and we were all struck by it to the last man.

"Hang it," the men muttered, "it's only for a night. We'll find something more cheerful tomorrow."

I did not care much for the place, but we had no choice.

Dusk was near. A stream purled at the bottom of the gorge. I chose a level spot on its bank and ordered my men to pitch the tents.

The sound of axes and human voices instantly shattered the overbearing silence of the forest. The men gathered fire-wood and unsaddled the horses. We had dinner, but our pack-animals went hungry in this wilderness of stones and fallen timber. We meant to make that up to them the next day if we should come across Chinese peasant fanzas.

As usual in the taiga, dusk fell early. In the west rags of pale sky were still visible through the dense foliage, while the shadows of night already settled below, on the earth. The flames of our campfire blazed merrily and illuminated the shrubs and tree-trunks nearest to us. Our camp gradually grew quiet. After tea the men occupied themselves with their rifles, saddles, and torn garments. There is always much of this kind of mending and tinkering on the march. After they were done with it, the men turned in. They lay bunched closely together, covered with their greatcoats, sound asleep. The horses failed to find fodder in the woods, returned to the camp and, hanging their heads, dozed standing up. Only Olentyev and I were awake. He was mending his boots; I was making notes in my diary. At about ten I wrapped myself in my sheepskin coat and curled up by the fire. The branches of the rugged fir-tree at whose foot we had pitched our camp, swayed overhead in the heat rising with the smoke from our fire, alternately opening and shutting from view the black, star-studded sky. The trees, like interminable rows of pillars, receded into the heart of the forest and merged imperceptibly with the black of the night.

Suddenly, the horses raised their heads and pricked up their ears; then they relaxed again, resuming their slumber. We paid no heed at first, and went on talking. Some minutes passed. I put a question to Olentyev, but received no reply and turned to look at him. He was up on his feet, tensed, his hand raised to screen his eyes from the fire, peering intently into the dark.

"What's up?" I asked.

"Someone's coming down the mountain side," he whispered.

But there was a dead quiet about us, the deep silence of a forest on a cold autumn night. Suddenly it was shattered as a rain of pebbles rolled down from above.

"It's a bear," Olentyev gasped, loading his rifle.

"Don't shoot! No bear!" came a voice from the dark, and a few minutes later a man stepped out of the shadows to our fire.

He wore a deerskin jacket and trousers. A kind of fillet adorned his head. There were untas* on his feet, he had a large knapsack, a long old-fashioned chassepot, and a self-made musket-rest.

"Hello, captain," said the newcomer, turning to me.

He leaned his rifle against a tree, took off the knapsack and squatted by the fire, wiping sweat off his brow with the sleeve of his shirt. He was about forty-five, of medium height, stocky, and to all appearances of fair physical strength. His tanned face was typically native, with prominent cheekbones, a small nose, eyes of a Mongolian shape, and a big mouth with a set of strong teeth. Thin chestnut whiskers fringed his upper lip and a small gingerish beard hid the chin. But most remarkable of all were his eyes. They were a dark grey, placid, frank, good-natured, and somewhat naive. But at the same time they had a quality of resolute power.

---

* *Untas*—native footwear made of elk or deerskin, finished much like suède.—*Tr.*

The stranger looked away modestly as we scrutinized him. He pulled out a tobacco pouch, filled his pipe, and lit it. I refrained from questioning him, and offered him a meal. Such was the custom of the taiga.

"Thanks, captain," he said, "I am hungry. Didn't eat all day."

I continued to examine him as he ate. A hunting knife was tucked into his belt. He was obviously a hunter, his hands rough and scarred. Similar scars, only deeper, were on his face—one on the forehead, the other on the cheek, near his ear. The stranger took off the headband and revealed a shock of tousled thick blond hair. He was a man of few words. Olentyev, not inclined to patience, could stand his reserve no longer, and asked:

"What are you, Chinese or Korean?"

"I am Gold," he replied curtly.

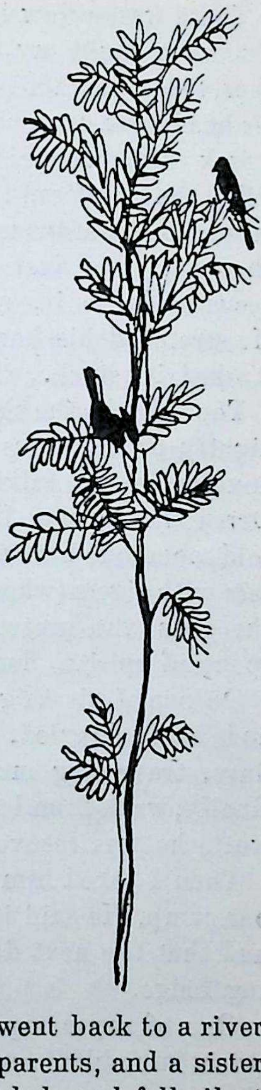
"A hunter?" I asked.

"Yes," he said, "a hunter. Don't know any other work. Only hunting."

"Where is your home?" Olentyev continued.

"I have no home. Always live in the mountains. Make fire, pitch tent, and sleep. A hunter cannot have a home."

Then he told us he had been hunting red deer all that day, and had wounded a doe, but only slightly. While pursuing the wounded animal he spotted our tracks, and they had led him to the gully. After dusk he saw our fire and came to it.



"I come quietly," he said, "never know what kind of people meet in the mountains. Then I saw captain and soldiers, and had no more fear."

"What is your name?" I asked the stranger.

"Dersu Uzala," he replied.

The man fascinated me. There was something uncommon about him. He spoke simply, in a hushed voice, his behaviour was reserved, modest, but not ingratiating. Our conversation flowed on and on. He spoke to me about himself, and the longer he spoke, the more likeable he was—a primeval hunter who had spent all his life in the taiga. He won his livelihood with the rifle and bartered his spoils with the Chinese for tobacco, lead, and gunpowder. His quaint chassepot had come down to him from his father. He said he was fifty-three, that he had never had a home, that he always lived in the open, and that in winter he made a yurt for himself from birch bark. The reminiscences of his early childhood went back to a river, a primitive hunting lodge, a fire, his parents, and a sister.

"They all die long ago," he concluded, and fell silent. But he soon resumed his tale: "I had wife, son and daughter. They die from smallpox. Now I am alone."

There was sorrow in his face. I wanted to console him, but what could my words mean to this lonely old man, deprived of his family, his sole comfort. He said nothing, his head sank upon his chest. My heart went out to him. It struck me that he would probably like to have a new rifle, and I offered to exchange his old-fashioned one for mine. But he turned my offer down, saying that the chassepot was dear to him as a keepsake, that he was accustomed to it, and that it was a splendid firearm. He stretched his hand out, took the rifle, and lovingly stroked its stock.

The stars in the sky had traversed a good part of their nightly path. It was long after midnight. Hour followed hour as we sat talking by the campfire. It was mostly Dersu who spoke. I listened with genuine pleasure. He told me about his hunting experiences, about his encounters with tigers (whom men should not shoot, for they were the gods who protected ginseng from evil people), and spoke of spirits, floods, and many other things.

On one of his taiga trips he was attacked by a tiger, and badly mauled. His wife searched for him several days, traversing more than 125 miles, and found him finally, weak from loss of blood. She did all their hunting while he was recovering from his wounds.

Then I asked him about the place where we had made our camp. He said it was close to the source of the Lefu, and that the next day we should come to our first hunting lodge.

One of my companions woke up, stared at us in surprise, mumbled something, smiled, and went back to sleep.

A new dawn was creeping up from where the twinkling stars kept rising in quick succession. A solemn silence reigned, and an abundant dew fell to earth—a sure sign of fine weather. Nature, it seemed, was in repose.

An hour later the east turned red. I looked at my watch. It was six, time to rouse the cook. I shook him by his shoulder. He sat up and stretched himself with a wry face, averting his eyes from the bright blaze of the campfire. Then he noticed Dersu and murmured smilingly:

"Look at that! A stranger!"—and pulled on his boots.

The black sky was turning blue, then grey. The shades of night withdrew to the thickets and gullies. Our camp was soon a beehive of activity: men chattered to each other, the horses were roused from their sleep, a bird raised a din close by, and another chimed in farther down the gully; there was the cry of a woodpecker and the staccato music of a sapsucker.

The taiga was waking up. It was getting lighter with every passing minute, and suddenly vivid sunrays broke out from behind the mountains, illuminating the entire forest. Our camp took on a new appearance. A heap of ashes lay in place of the fire. The flames were practically dead. Empty tins littered the ground. Only the uprights still stood that had supported our tents, and the cut grass we had slept on, lay trampled on the earth.

## 2. BOAR HUNT

After breakfast the riflemen saddled the pack-animals. Dersu put on his knapsack and picked up his chassepot and musket-rest. A few minutes later our little troop broke camp. Dersu came with us.

The gorge which we followed was long and winding. Other gorges merged with it on the right and left. Water streamed along them noisily. The ravine gradually widened and turned into a valley. We saw time-worn marks on the trees, which led us to a path. The Gold went in advance of our party, gazing intently under his feet. At times he would bend and shuffle the leaves with his fingers.

"What is it?" I asked.

Dersu said we were on a footpath, and that it led past sable traps, that a lone trapper had walked along it several days before, and that, most likely, it had been a Chinese.

His words amazed us. He sensed our mistrust and exclaimed:

"Don't you see it? Look for yourself!"

His proofs were so conclusive that all my doubts evaporated. It was all clear and simple, and I wondered why I had not noticed anything myself. For one, there were no hoofprints along the path; the branches on both sides of it had not been cleared; our horses were making difficult progress, their packs brushing constantly against the trees. The turns were so sharp the beasts could not take them, and had to make detours; logs were laid across the brooks, and nowhere did the path lead through the water; the wind-fallen trees were not cleared, and while my men stepped freely, the horses had to skirt them. All this showed that the path was not intended for pack-horses.

"One man passed here long time ago," Dersu was saying. "And after he pass, rain go." He counted the days since the last rainfall.

We walked along the path for about two hours. The coniferous forest was gradually giving way to poplars, maples, aspens, birches and lime-trees. I was on the point of calling our second halt, but Dersu advised us to go on for a bit.

"We soon find good camp," he said, and pointed to trees whose bark was stripped.

I understood what he meant. Someone had made use of the bark to build a lodge in the vicinity. We quickened our pace and in about ten minutes came to a shed apparently built by trappers or ginseng hunters. Upon inspecting it, our new acquaintance said that the Chinese who had passed along the path a few days before had spent the night in the shed. There were the rain-drenched ashes, the lone grass couch, and the abandoned old daba* knee-caps to support his deductions. I realized then that Dersu was an extraordinary creature, a pathfinder, and my thoughts went back unconsciously to Fenimore Cooper and Mayne Reid.

The horses had to be fed, and while the men took care of them, I reclined in the shade of a huge Siberian cedar and promptly fell asleep. Olentyev roused me some two hours later. I noticed that Dersu had chopped wood and stacked it in the shed, and had gathered birch bark.

I had the notion that he wanted to burn down the lodge, and started talking him out of the idea. But instead of replying he asked me for a pinch of salt and a handful of rice. I was curious to know why he wanted them, and told my men to give him what he asked. The Gold carefully wrapped some matches in birch bark, and made separate birch-bark parcels of the salt and rice. Then he hung them all in the shed, adjusted the bark on the shed's roof, and made ready to depart.

---

* *Daba*—a durable blue textile used by the Chinese.—*Tr.*

"You probably expect to return?" I asked him.

He shook his head negatively. I asked him then why he was leaving the rice, salt and matches.

"Other man come," Dersu replied, "find shed, find wood, find matches, find food. No die!"

I was astounded. The Gold worried about some stranger whom he would never see, and who would never know who had chopped the wood and provided the food for him. I recalled that my men always burned all the discarded bark when leaving a campsite; not out of ill will, of course, simply for the fun of seeing it burn, and I had never stopped them. This savage, indeed, was more of a humanitarian than we.

"Horses ready! Time we went," said Olentyev, approaching me.

I came out of my reverie.

"Yes, it's high time."

"March!" I said to the riflemen, and walked on ahead along the path.

Towards nightfall we came to a place where two streams merged. It was the true source of the Lefu. I went to bed soon after our evening meal and fell asleep instantly. When I woke up next day, the men were on their feet. I ordered the horses saddled, and while the men fussed with the packs, I prepared my sketching board and went off in advance with Dersu.

The valley twisted westward. The slopes on the left were steep, the right slopes flat. With each mile the path improved. We came across a tree felled with an axe. Dersu examined it and said it had been cut in spring by two men.

"One man tall—his axe blunt; other man small—sharp axe."

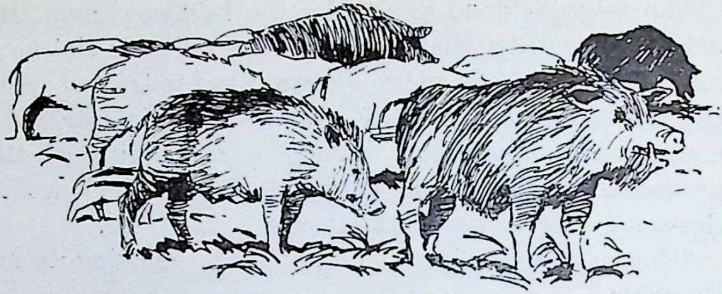
The taiga held no secrets for the backwoodsman. He divined everything that went on like a veritable clairvoyant. I resolved to be more observant and to try and read the tracks and signs myself. We came to another man-made stump. Splinters, soaked in resin, littered the ground around it. I concluded that someone had needed fire-wood. There was nothing else I could see.

"House near," said Gold, as though replying to my thoughts.

Indeed, we soon came to trees stripped of their bark and about 200 yards away, on the river-bank, in the middle of a clearing, stood a hunting lodge. It was a small-sized structure with adobe walls and bark roofing, a stake propping up the door on the outside. I deduced from this that it was uninhabited. There was a tiny vegetable patch alongside, dug up ruthlessly by wild pigs, and to the left, a wooden shrine facing south.

The interior appointments of the lodge were crude. There was an iron cauldron embedded in a low fire-place with heating ducts leading to the Chinese-style k'angs, two or three troughs, a wooden dipper, an iron chopping knife, a metal spoon, a brush to wash the cauldron, two dusty bottles, some cast-off rags, one or two stools, an oil lamp and tatters of fur scattered on the floor.

Three paths led from the hut up the Lefu. One was the path we had come by, another ran due east into the hills, and the third due west. The last was obviously used more than the other two. It bore a great many hoofprints. We followed it. The riflemen flung the bridles on the horses' necks, and let the animals choose the way. The clever beasts did their best to avoid brushing the packs against the overhanging branches. In swampy places, and whenever they came to stones, they stepped cautiously, test-



ing the ground with their legs before putting their whole weight on them. This is a distinctive trait of the local horses, accustomed as they are to travel in the taiga with heavy packs.

After some four miles we came to a cluster of peasant huts on the right bank of the river at the foot of a tall mountain which the Chinese called Tudsing.

The unexpected arrival of our armed troop alarmed the Chinese, but Dersu allayed their fears.

The local Chinese do not do much farming. They prefer to hunt and trap. Small patches of cultivated land adjoined their huts, where they grew wheat, foxtail millet and maize. They complained of the wild boars which, they said, came in packs from the mountains and were devastating their fields. They had had to pick the vegetables long before they were ripe, but now the oaks were shedding their acorns and the pigs had returned to the oak groves.

The sun was high and I decided to climb the Tudsing to survey the vicinity. Dersu came with me. We took nothing but our guns.

The trees were shedding their autumn foliage, and visibility in the taiga had improved. Only the oak groves were still fully adorned in their garb, which had lost lustre and was half dry.

The mountain was steep. Twice we stopped for a breather and then continued our ascent.

The earth round us was trampled. Dersu stopped now and then to examine the tracks. He divined the age and sex of the animals that made them, found the spoors of a lame boar, and spotted a place where two boars had fought with each other. He explained how he knew all that, and I saw it plainly in my mind's eye. I wondered why I had never before paid heed to signs.

"Look, captain," Dersu said, pointing to the opposite side of a gully. "What is that?"

I saw a dark spot, thought it was the shadow of a cloud, and said as much. He laughed and pointed to the sky. There was not a single cloud overhead. A few minutes later the spot changed its shape and moved sideways.

"Well, what is it?" I asked.

"If you no understand," he replied, "we must go and look."

We began our descent. Soon I noticed that the spot was moving in our direction. Some ten minutes later the Gold stopped and seated himself on a stone, motioning to me to follow his example.

"Must wait here," he whispered, "sit still, no talk."

We waited. Soon the spot reappeared. It had grown to large proportions. I could now see that it was a teeming mass of living beings perpetually changing their location.

"Boars!" I exclaimed.

There were more than a hundred. Some of the animals would break away from the pack, but instantly returned to it. We could soon distinguish each animal separately.

"One man very big," Dersu said in a whisper.

I did not understand what "man" he was referring to, and looked at him questioningly.

In the middle of the pack the back of a huge boar rose above the rest like a mound. The pack was coming closer every minute. We clearly heard the dry leaves crushed by hundreds of hooves, the snapping of twigs, the abrupt barks of the boars, the grunts of the sows and squeals of sucklings.

"Big man will not come near," Dersu said, and again I failed to grasp the meaning of his words.

The giant boar was in the middle of the pack; many of the animals wandered off in different directions, some quite a big distance away from it. A few of them approached to within a stone's throw from us, but the big boar was out of shooting range. We sat motionlessly. One of the boars closest to us raised its snout. It was chewing, and its bulky head, pricked-up ears, savage eyes, its long fidgety muzzle, and the white tusks, are all clearly imprinted in my memory to this day. The animal froze in its pose, ceased chewing and fixed its angry piercing little eyes upon us. Awakening to danger, it emitted a sharp cry. The pack veered and made off with a lot of noise and grunting in the opposite direction. In that instant a shot resounded and one of the animals tumbled to the ground. The rifle in Dersu's hands was smoking. There was the sound of snapping twigs as the pigs bolted, and then silence.

The Ussuri boar weighs up to 650 lbs. It is about seven feet long and over three feet tall. Lively and strong, it has perfect eyesight and hearing and a highly developed sense of smell. When wounded, the boar is dangerous. Woe to the unwise hunter who throws caution to the winds when trailing a wounded hog. The hog lies down in its track, facing its pursuer. On sighting him, it charges so precipitously that the latter often has not even the time to raise his rifle.

The wild pig killed by Dersu was a two-year-old sow. I asked him why he had not aimed at the big boar.

"He is old man," he said, "his meat no good to eat. Smell bad."

I asked why Dersu referred to boars as "men."

"He is same as man," Dersu said, "only his shirt is different. He can be cunning, he can be angry, he can be anything! Same as man."

The woodsman's views were obviously animalistic. He attributed human features to his environment.

Dersu quickly skinned the sow, heaved it up on his shoulders, and we headed back to our camp, which was an hour's walk away.

It was cramped and smoky in the Chinese huts, and I made my bed in the open at Dersu's side.

"I think," he said, glancing at the sky, "the night will be warm, but tomorrow evening—rain."

## 3. AT A KOREAN VILLAGE

I woke up later than the others. The sky was overcast. The riflemen were taking precautions to protect the packs from rain, but Dersu said:

"No hurry. It will be fine all day. Rain only in the evening."

I asked him why he thought so.

"Look yourself," the Gold replied. "Small birds walk back and forth, play, eat. If rain near they sit still."

I thought of the quiet that usually precedes rain. It was quite different at the moment: the forest throbbed with life; woodpeckers, jays and cedar-birds chattered everywhere, and the fussy nuthatch whistled merrily.

We asked the Chinese about the way, and pushed off.

Beyond the Tatianshan Mountains the Lefu valley widened. This part of it, about two miles wide, was more populated.

At about two we came to the village of Nikolayevka. After a brief rest I told Olentyev to buy oats and feed the horses, while Dersu and I went on ahead. I was eager to reach a near-by Korean village, where I expected to find a night's lodging for my little troop.

It gets dark early on a cloudy autumn day. It began to drizzle at about five, and we quickened our pace. Soon we came to a forking of the road. One fork led across the river, and the other into the mountains. We took the latter, and on the way came to other cross-roads leading in various directions.

It was quite dark when we approached the village.

By that time the main body of our troop had come to the road forking. They did not know which way to go, and fired into the air. Fearing that they would choose the wrong road, I replied to their signal. There was a sudden shouting in the nearest hut, a shot rang out from its window, followed by a second and third. In a few minutes the whole village was shooting. I was confused. The rain, the shouting, and the rifle shots dumbfounded me. What had happened? Why all the turmoil? Then a light appeared in one of the huts. A Korean came out with an oil torch in one hand, and an old-fashioned rifle in the other. He ran towards us, shouting something in his own language. We ran to meet him. The flickering, reddish light of the torch leaped from puddle to puddle, and lighted the man's fear-smitten face. When he saw us the Korean threw the torch down to the ground, took a point-blank shot at Dersu, and fled. The spilt kerosene blazed on the ground with a smoky flame.

"Are you hit?" I asked Dersu anxiously.

"No," he said and stooped to pick up the torch.

I saw that the shots from the village were being aimed at him, but he rose to his full height, waved, and shouted something to the Koreans.

Olentyev, who heard the shooting, concluded that we were attacked by hunhutsi, or Chinese outlaws. Leaving the horses behind with two of the men, he hurried to our aid with the others. The firing from the nearest hut ceased at last, and Dersu negotiated with its inmates. They would not open their doors to us. No arguments helped. They cursed, and threatened to resume firing.

There was nothing we could do but pitch our tents on the river-bank, and make a fire. There was an old tumble-down hut some distance from the village. Fire-wood was stacked along its wall, chopped by the Koreans for the winter. The shooting in the village went on for hours. The huts on its outskirts kept it up all night. What the firing was about remained a puzzle even to the Koreans. My riflemen swore caustically, and laughed.

We rested all of the following day. The men were told to overhaul the saddles, to dry our things over the fire, and clean the rifles.

The rain had ceased; a chilly northwester dispersed the clouds, and the sun came out.

I went to have a look at the village.

After the firing of the night before one would expect the Koreans to come to our encampment and see the people they had been shooting at. But they did not. Two men emerged from a near-by hut, dressed in white jackets with flowing sleeves, white quilted trousers, and rope-soled sandals. They did not even glance at us in passing. An old man sat by another hut, twisting thread. When I approached him, he glanced up at me, but his face was a blank, with no trace of either curiosity or surprise. A woman was walking our way. She wore a white skirt and blouse; her breast was bare. She carried an earthenware water jug on her head, her eyes fixed on the ground. When she drew level she did not make way for us, and did not raise her eyes. Wherever I came I was met with the stony indifference so typical of Koreans. "Land of Morning Calm," I remembered, was the apt name given to Korea. Koreans live in farmsteads in the midst of their fields. Their homes are consequently scattered at great distances from each other. That is why, as a rule, a small Korean village sprawls over several square miles.

On the way back I entered one of the huts. Its thin walls were smeared with clay. It had three doors with grated paper windows. The pyramidal thatched roof was wattled.

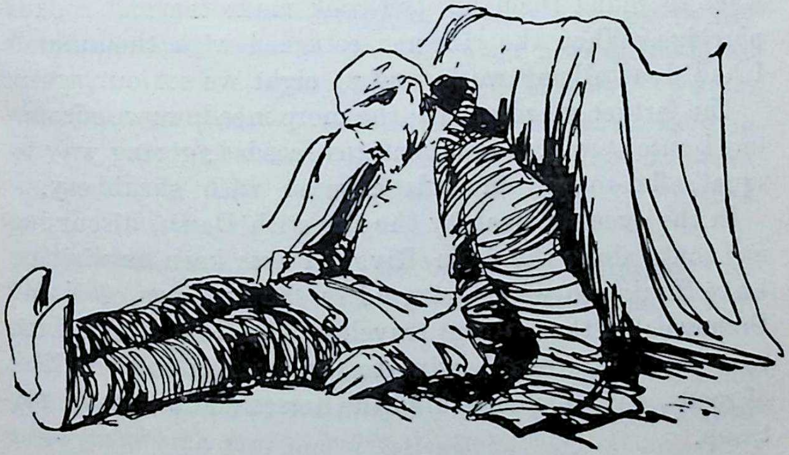
In the house I recognized the woman who had earlier crossed our path with the jug on her head. Squatting on her haunches, she was drawing water into a cauldron with a wooden ladle. She was doing it in a leisurely fashion, raising the ladle high and pouring the water in a strange manner over her hand to the right. She looked up at me indifferently and went on with her work without uttering a word. A man of about fifty was sitting on the k'ang smoking a pipe. He did not budge, and did not reply to my greeting. I stood there for a minute or so, and then went out into the open again.

After dinner I set out to inspect the vicinity. I roamed about for some two hours, and finally came back to the edge of the river.

Evening was near, and light pink clouds crept slowly across the sky. The distant mountains, lit up by the rays of the setting sun, took on a purple hue. The trees, stripped of their foliage, looked a monotonous grey. A solemn quiet reigned in the Korean village. White wisps of smoke curled upwards from the long chimneys, melting rapidly in the cool evening air. The white shapes of the villagers flitted along the paths. A fire away at the edge of the river indicated the site of our encampment.

It was dusk when I returned. The water in the river was black, reflecting the flames of our fire and the winking stars in the sky. The riflemen sat round the blaze; one of them was spinning a yarn, drawing roars of laughter from the others.

"Come and get it!" the cook shouted, and the laughter broke off abruptly.



After the evening meal I sat by the fire, jotting down my observations in the diary. Dersu was rummaging about in his knapsack and tending the fire.

"Chilly," he said, shrugging his shoulders.

"Sleep in the tent," I suggested.

"No," he replied, "I always sleep outside."

He stuck several osier twigs into the ground behind him and stretched his tenting over them, then spread a sheepskin on the ground, sat on it, throwing a leather jacket over his shoulders, and lit his pipe. A few minutes later I heard a soft snoring. He was asleep. His head sank to his chest, his arms dropped, the pipe fell out of his mouth and lay in his lap.

The river rumbled hollowly, a dog barked somewhere beyond the village, and a child was crying in one of the distant huts. I wrapped myself into my sheepskin coat, curled up with my back to the fire, and fell asleep.

We were up at the crack of dawn. In the night our horses, who failed to find fodder in the Korean fields, had wandered off towards the mountains. While the men went to round them up, the cook made tea and cooked porridge. When the riflemen returned with the animals I had done all my work, and at eight we set out again.

The farther we advanced, the more meadows we encountered on our way. The mountains receded, giving way to squat, flat-topped mounds covered with shrubbery.

In the evening I sat by the fire with Dersu, discussing our route along the Lefu River. I was keen on visiting Lake Hanka, so well portrayed in the writings of N. M. Przhevalsky, the eminent traveller. The Gold advised me to proceed in a boat, owing to the swamps and the lack of roads, and to leave behind the horses and a part of my troop.

Next morning I picked Olentyev and Marchenko, one of the riflemen, to accompany me, and sent the others to the village of Chernigovka with orders to await my return. With the help of the village elder we soon obtained a fairly suitable flat-bottomed boat and spent the day fitting it out for the long journey.

Dersu was busy with the oars. He made locks out of pegs, mended the seats and equipped the boat with a set of poles. I admired the efficient and nimble manner in which he worked. He neither fussed, nor tarried, his actions were measured and deliberate. Life had obviously schooled him to be active and prompt. In one of the huts we discovered some home-made rusks—the only thing we were short of. Everything else—tea, sugar, salt, cereals and canned foods—was available in sufficient quantities. The same evening we transferred all our stores to the boat on the advice of the Gold, and spent the night on the bank.

The night was raw and windy. There was too little firewood to make a big fire, and we were all cold and hardly slept a wink. I tried wrapping myself snuggly in my sheepskin coat, but the searing wind always found an opening in it, chilling my shoulder, side or back. The wood was of a bad quality; it crackled and showered us with sparks, burning a hole in Dersu's blanket. I heard him scolding the log quaintly, calling it "a bad man."

"He burn like he cry," he muttered, imitating the crackling of fire-wood with his voice. "Must drive him away."

After that I heard a splash and a long hiss. The old man had thrown the burning log into the river. Drowsiness overcame me, and I fell asleep.

Waking up some time later, I found Dersu sitting by the fire. He was tending it. The wind was scattering the flames in all directions. The Gold, I discovered, had put his blanket over my sheepskin coat. That is why I felt warm enough to sleep. The riflemen were also covered with his tent over their greatcoats. I offered Dersu to lie down in my place, but he refused.

"No need, captain," he said. "You sleep, I watch the fire. He very bad,"—and he pointed at the fire-wood.

The better I got to know him, the more I liked him. Each day he revealed new admirable traits. I had always thought that selfishness was particularly inherent in the uncivilized and that the sense of humanism, love of man and solicitude for others was cultivated only in the Europeans. But it seems I was mistaken. It was with this thought that I went back to sleep.

## 4. LOWER REACHES OF THE LEFU

Dersu roused us when it was broad daylight.

He had made tea and fried the meat. After breakfast I dispatched the riflemen with the horses to Chernigovka, while we lowered the boat into the river and set out on our voyage.

Speeded on its way with poles, the boat travelled with the current at a good rate. Some three miles down-river we came to a railway bridge and stopped for a rest. Dersu said he had been in these parts with his father when a boy. They had hunted goats. He had heard from the Chinese about the railway, but had never seen it before.

Mountains rose hard by the railway bridge. I disembarked and climbed the nearest hill to have a look at the surroundings. A fascinating view met my eyes. Behind us in the east the mountains crowded each other. The flat hills in the south were sparsely wooded, and in the north, as far as the eye could see, stretched an endless grassy expanse of lowland. Much as I tried, I could not see the end of it. It receded into the distance and vanished somewhere beyond the horizon. A gust of wind would run across it, and the long grass rippled and billowed like the sea. Sickly-looking birches, emaciated larches, and other trees grew in spots singly or in clumps. The course of the Lefu was easily plotted from my vantage point by all the alders and willows which grew profusely along its banks.

The men were thoroughly sick of sitting in the boat and wanted to stretch their limbs. I longed to go into the open field. Olentyev and Marchenko began making camp, while Dersu and I went hunting.

The grass, tall and dense, seemed to engulf us. There was grass underfoot, in front and behind us, and grass on our flanks. But overhead there was the blue sky. We had a sense of walking along the bottom of a grass ocean, and the impression grew even more when, on climbing a mound, I saw the steppe billowing all round. I plunged back into the green, apprehensive and abashed, and went on. It was as easy here to lose one's way as in the taiga. We lost our bearings several times, but hastily set our error right. I would climb a mound, on sighting one, to try and see what lay ahead. Dersu took armfuls of herbs and wormwood and bent them to the ground. I looked round, but all I could see was an endless billowing ocean of grass.

These marshy steppes are chiefly populated by birds. It was migration-time, and thousands upon thousands

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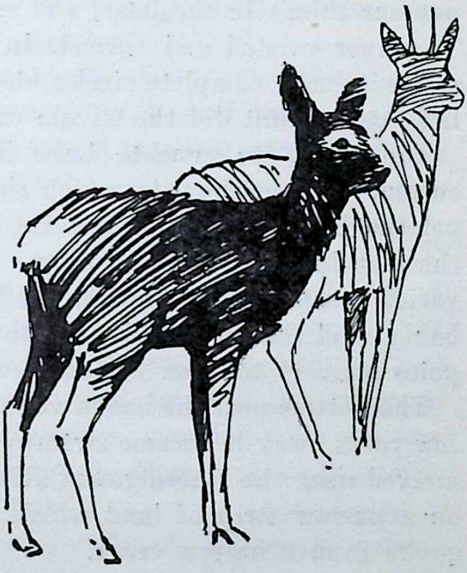
of birds were on the wing southward in large and small flights. Flocks of them rose into the blue, others swooped down, and all of them, near and far, stood out in bold relief against the sky, giving the impression that the heavens were covered with a spider's web. I gazed at the sight in a trance. The eagles flew higher than the other birds. Spreading their powerful wings, they soared in large circles. Some of them flew so high they were barely visible. Below them, and yet high above the earth, flew geese. The cautious birds flew in regular flights, flapping their wings heavily and filling the air with their shrill cries. Barnacle geese and swans flew by their side. The ducks, fussy and indefatigable, rushed by noisily, skimming the earth. Among them were flocks of heavy mallards, easily recognized by the peculiar whirr of their wings, and below them, nearer the water, came thousands of teals and other smaller ducks. Falcons described graceful circles, then hovered in mid air with wings quivering, eyes vigilantly fixed upon the earth in search of prey. At times they would circle slowly, and then, folding their wings, drop headlong to the ground, soaring up again when a few inches from the grass. The graceful and lively mews flitted by in their snow-white plumage. The grey sea-gulls kept to the swampy downs. Puddles of stagnant water seemed to serve them as milestones, showing them the course.

Two roes startled us, appearing on the scene like a bolt from the blue. They were some sixty paces away, almost totally concealed from us by the dense grass. We could only catch a glimpse of their heads, ears projecting sideways. They ran some hundred and fifty paces and stopped. I fired and missed. The echo of the report travelled far over the water. Thousands of birds took wing and flew off with loud cries. The frightened roes bounded away. Dersu took deliberate aim, pulling the trigger when the head of one of them appeared above the grass. When the smoke cleared the animals were out of sight. The Gold reloaded and walked forward unhurriedly. I followed him in silence. He looked round, turned back, and then struck off at a sharp angle. Then he retraced his steps.



"What are you looking for?" I asked.

"Roe," he replied.

"But they made off," I said.

"No," he said confidently. "I hit one."

Although I doubted his words, I joined in the search. It seemed to me that he was mistaken. But some ten minutes later we found the roe. The bullet had struck its head. Dersu heaved it upon his shoulders and walked slowly back. We came to our encampment at dusk. A clump of trees loomed dark near the river. They looked alike, and our campfire glimmered between their trunks. The evening was placid and cool. A flock of ducks descended noisily upon the water somewhere near us, and we made out by their manner of flying that they were teals.

After the evening meal Dersu and Olentyev skinned the roe, and I wrote in my diary. When I had made all my entries, I turned in, but every time I closed my eyes a billowing cobweb rose before me: it was the rippling ocean of grass, and the countless flights of geese and ducks. Towards dawn I fell asleep.

Next morning we rose early, had a quick breakfast, put our things in the boat, and set out down the Lefu. The river twisted and turned. In places its curves described almost complete circles, doubling back and twisting. At no point did the stream run a straight course.

The nearer we came to Lake Hanka, the slower the current became. The poles which the riflemen used to propel the boat often stuck fast in the river bottom, and the men lost their grip on them. The depth of the Lefu varied constantly. Frequently our boat rammed into sandbanks, and then it would come to deep places where our poles scarcely touched bottom.

The bottom near the banks was solid enough, but just a few yards away it became swampy. Towards nightfall we arrived near the Chernigovka River and pitched camp on a narrow strip of land which separated the Chernigovka from a narrow creek.

The birds were particularly plentiful that day. Olentyev bagged several ducks, which made a sumptuous dinner. After dark the birds ceased their flight. A deep silence reigned. The steppe showed no signs of life, yet there was not a single lakelet, or pool, or watercourse that did not accommodate sleeping flights of swans, geese, ducks, and other aquatic birds.

Marchenko and Olentyev turned in, while Dersu and I sat and talked as had become our custom. The tea-kettle, forgotten on the fire, intruded upon our conversation with its tiresome hissing. Dersu moved it away from the heart of the blaze, but it sang on. He moved it farther still, and the kettle changed its tune to a thinner hiss.

"How he cry!" Dersu exclaimed in exasperation. "Bad man!" He jumped to his feet and poured the boiling water on to the earth.

"Why do you call it 'man'?" I asked him in surprise.

"Water is a man," he replied simply. "He can cry, he can weep, he can also play."

He discoursed at great length about his world outlook. There was a living force in water, he said, for he had seen it flow calmly and he had seen it rage and roar during the floods.

"Look," said Dersu, pointing at the fire, "he is also the same as man."

I turned my eyes on the flames. The fire-wood crackled and emitted sparks. The fire shot up in long tongues, and then in short ones; it would be bright one minute, and wan the next; the charred wood assumed the shape of castles, and grottos, and then they would tumble and new ones would arise in their place. Dersu sat silent, while I gazed at the "living fire."

Next day we all woke up early. At the crack of dawn the feathered kingdom took wing and flew south with an unholy clamour. The geese were the first to rise, followed successively by the swans, the ducks and the other migrants. They flew low over the earth, rising higher and higher as it grew light.

We travelled some five miles before sunrise and reached the Chaidantsi Mountain. At that point the Lefu valley was more than 25 miles wide. The river forked out into numerous branches, some of which were dozens of miles long. The branches broke up into creeks, which branched out in their turn. All these watercourses ran over a wide strip of territory adjoining the river on both sides, and formed a treacherous labyrinth. Any attempt at leaving the main channel in favour of a watercourse that looked like a short cut, was fraught with the danger of getting lost.

We kept to the main channel most of the time, and turned off only in cases of extreme need, returning to it each time at the first opportunity. The watercourses, overgrown with reeds, completely hid our boat from sight. Our progress was soundless and we often came within shooting distance of the birds, lingering on several occasions to observe them at length.

I spotted a white heron with black legs and a yellow-green beak. It strutted proudly up and down in the water close to the bank, nodding its head rhythmically and keeping a sharp eye on the river bottom. On sighting the boat, it made several leaps, rose heavily in the air, and came down again some distance away on the neighbouring creek.

Then we saw a bittern. Its greyish-yellow plumage and beak, its yellow eyes and no less yellow shanks were uncommonly repulsive. The dour bird jogged along across the sand in hot pursuit of an alert and fussy snipe. The snipe would fly away a few paces, but on landing it would again be chased by the bittern, which, when near, rushed at the snipe, trying to strike it with its pointed beak. On seeing our boat the bittern hid in the grass, raised its head high, and froze on the spot. As the boat drew level with it Marchenko fired. The bullet passed within inches of the bird, but the bittern did not flicker an eyelid. Dersu burst out laughing.

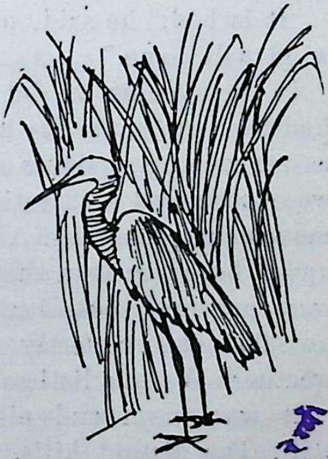
"Very cunning man. Always cheat," he said. Indeed, the bittern soon became undistinguishable. Its plumage and raised beak blended with the grass.

Farther on we were treated to another sight. A lonely kingfisher sat in the branches of a willow overhanging the water. The small bird with the large head and beak seemed to be sunk in slumber. Suddenly it plunged headlong into the water, dived deep, and reappeared a minute later with a fish in its beak. After swallowing its prey the kingfisher again perched drowsily on the branch. Hearing the plash of our boat it flew away down-river, crying loudly. The bright blue hues of its plumage flashed by in the sun. At some distance from our boat it seated itself on the branch of a bush, then took wing again, and finally disappeared behind a bend.

On two occasions we saw grebes, which are black little birds, expert divers that walk about freely upon the leaves of aquatic plants. In flight they kicked their large feet in a strange manner, giving us the impression that they had only recently left the nest and were still learning to fly.

In stagnant water we came upon sheldrakes with their multi-coloured collars. They did not fly away on sighting us. Instead, they hid in the grass, or dived into the river.

It was one of those warm October days that occur frequently in the southern reaches of the Ussuri. The sky was cloudless and clear; a mild breeze blew from the west. But weather of that kind is apt to be deceiving. It is



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often followed by a cold northwester. The longer the lull lasts, the more abrupt and sudden the change is likely to be.

That day we had the rare opportunity of observing a shadow segment of the earth in the east. The sunset brought with it a soft interplay of vivid colours. Pale at first, it soon turned emerald green, and two bright yellow rays shot up from beyond the horizon against this fascinating setting. They vanished several minutes later. The green hue changed to orange, and then to red. Finally it turned dim, as though shrouded in smoke. A shadow segment of the earth appeared in the east. It stretched across the horizon from north to south. Its outer edge was purple, and as the sun dipped the segment rose. The purple strip soon merged with the red in the west. A dark night followed.

I was spell-bound, watching the curious phenomenon. Dersu grumbled at my side:

"He doesn't understand."

I guessed that the remark referred to me and asked him to explain.

"It is bad," he said, pointing at the sky. "I think big wind will come."

In the evening we did not sit up long by the fire. We had risen early, the day had been a tiring one, and as soon as our evening meal was over we turned in. Next morning we experienced a sensation of languorous weakness. Our movements were dull. All of us felt the same symptoms, and I began to fear that we had contracted a fever or were poisoned, but Dersu reassured me. The condition, he said, was perfectly normal before a change in the weather. We ate listlessly and pushed off.

It was warm and placid. The reeds were perfectly still. The distant hills, clearly visible the day before, were completely shrouded from sight by an ink-black darkness. Ragged little clouds swam in the pale sky. The sun overhead had crowns on it. The teeming feathered multitude was conspicuous by its absence. The geese and ducks, and all the smaller birds, had vanished. Only the bald eagles still soared in the blue. They had probably ascended beyond the zone of the atmospheric phenomenon which caused the general apathy and drowsiness among living beings on the ground.

"Never mind," Dersu kept saying, "I think wind will come in the afternoon."

I asked him why the birds had stopped flying and he delivered a long lecture on migration. Birds, he said, like to fly against the wind. In a dead calm and in warm weather they roost in the swamps. If the wind blows from behind, they freeze because the cold air penetrates under their feathers. In that event they seek shelter in the grass. Only when surprised by a snowfall do the migrants fly on in spite of wind and cold.

## 5. ON LAKE HANKA

As we neared Lake Hanka the valley became more and more of a swamp. The trees along the banks gave place to thin, emaciated shrubbery. The current, sluggish in this stretch of the river, had a decided influence on the surrounding flora. There were lilies, buttercups and water nuts, etc. The reeds were so dense in places that our boat could go no farther and we had to make detours. We lost our way and came to a kind of *cul-de-sac*. Olentyev wanted to leave the boat and explore the surroundings, but when he stepped on the bank he sank knee-deep in a bog. We turned back and came to a lake, where we finally found the desired watercourse. The labyrinth of sedge grass and reeds now lay behind us, and we thanked our stars for getting off cheap. Every day it was more and more difficult to get our bearings.

Previously we could trace the course of the river for quite some distance ahead by the trees growing on its banks, but these had long since disappeared and there were not even shrubs to tell us which way the stream would turn in the next few yards.

Dersu had been right. At midday the wind rose, gaining in intensity and changing its direction from south to west. The geese and ducks took wing again, flying low over the earth.

At one point we discovered an abundance of driftwood, which had floated down-river during the floods. That was not to be sneezed at on the Lefu, where you constantly ran the risk of being stranded overnight without firewood. A few minutes later the men were unloading the boat, while Dersu made the fire and pitched the tent.

By boat it was about ten miles to Lake Hanka, while on foot, as the crow flies, it was no more than two. Next day, Dersu and I decided, we would walk there and come back to the encampment before dark. Olentyev and Marchenko would stay behind and await our return.

We all had time on our hands in the evening and sat round the fire sipping tea. The dry wood burnt merrily. The reeds swayed in the dark, and their rustling gave the impression that the wind was strong, stronger than it really was.

The sky was black. Only the biggest stars twinkled feebly. The plash of the surf reached us from the lake.

Towards morning the sky was overcast. The weather had deteriorated, but not enough to interfere with our planned excursion.

At about ten, after leaving all the necessary instructions, Dersu and I set out. We expected to be back before dusk. I had a warm sweater on under my jacket, while Dersu took along a tarpaulin and two pairs of fur socks.

He kept looking up at the sky along the way, mumbling under his breath, and finally turned to me.

"Captain, tell me we go back early, or not? I think, we're in for a bad night."

I replied that Lake Hanka was close at hand and that we should not stay there long. Dersu was always quick to acquiesce. He never neglected to give warning, but if it went unheeded he resigned himself to the impending danger. It was the same this time.

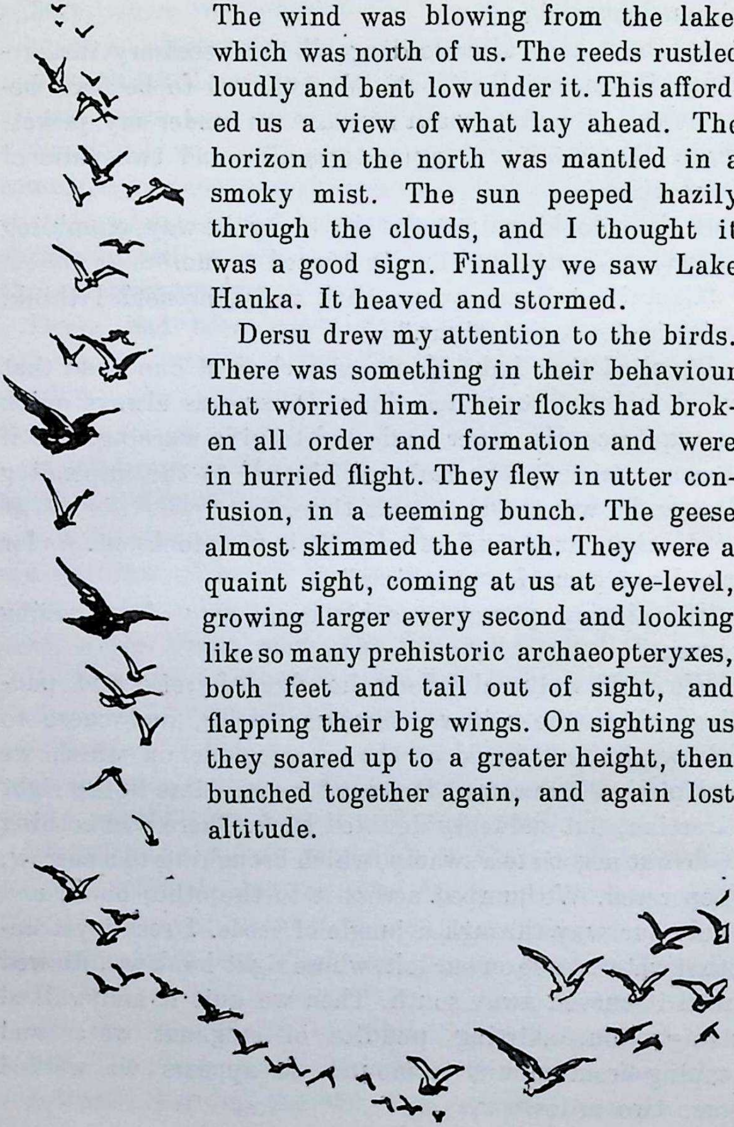
"All right, captain," he said. "It is your look-out. As for me, I am game for anything."

The closing phrase was his usual way of expressing consent.

We could walk only along the edges of creeks and puddles, where the soil was somewhat drier, and chose to follow the left bank of the watercourse on which we had pitched our camp. It went for some time in the right direction, but suddenly doubled back. There was nothing to do but negotiate a swamp, which brought us to a narrow, deep creek. We jumped across it to the other bank, and made our way through a jungle of reeds. I recall yet another watercourse on our left, whose right bank we followed until it curved away south. Then we quit it and walked straight on, skirting puddles of stagnant water and leaping from mound to mound. It appears we walked some two miles.

Finally I stopped to take my bearings. The wind was blowing from the lake, which was north of us. The reeds rustled loudly and bent low under it. This afforded us a view of what lay ahead. The horizon in the north was mantled in a smoky mist. The sun peeped hazily through the clouds, and I thought it was a good sign. Finally we saw Lake Hanka. It heaved and stormed.

Dersu drew my attention to the birds. There was something in their behaviour that worried him. Their flocks had broken all order and formation and were in hurried flight. They flew in utter confusion, in a teeming bunch. The geese almost skimmed the earth. They were a quaint sight, coming at us at eye-level, growing larger every second and looking like so many prehistoric archaeopteryxes, both feet and tail out of sight, and flapping their big wings. On sighting us they soared up to a greater height, then bunched together again, and again lost altitude.



At about midday Dersu and I came to Lake Hanka. The fresh-water sea looked menacing. The watery expanse boiled like in a kettle. After our long journey through the grassy marshes its far-flung distances were a sight for sore eyes. I dropped to the sand and gazed enraptured at the surf. There was something fascinating about it. I could have sat for hours, watching the waves rush angrily up the shore.

The lake was deserted. We saw neither sail nor boat during the hour that we wandered along its shore shooting birds.

"Ducks have stopped flying," Dersu mused aloud.

Indeed, there were no birds in the air.

The black mist that had hovered low over the horizon began to rise suddenly, shutting out the sun. The solitary whitish clouds chased each other in a dark, cloudy sky, their edges ragged and hanging down in shreds like soiled cotton wool.

"Captain," Dersu said, "must hurry home quick. I am little bit afraid."

He was right. It was high time to think of turning back. When we came to the grass again I stopped for a last look at the lake. It was raging like a caged beast within its shores, raising a yellowish foam.

"The water is high," Dersu said, pointing to a creek.

There was no mistaking it. A powerful gale was driving the water to the mouth of the Lefu. The river left its banks and was flooding the flats. A big stream lay in our path. The place seemed unfamiliar. Dersu stopped, thought a bit, and went to the left. Arriving at a bend of the creek we struck away from it, walking south. In a few minutes we found ourselves floundering in a bog and had to return to the watercourse. Then we turned right, came to another watercourse, and forded it. From here we went due east, but again stumbled into a bog. Finally we found a dry strip; it stretched like a bridge across the marshes. We advanced cautiously, testing the ground before putting our weight on it. Some 600 yards away was a dry spot of dense grassland. The bog was now behind us.

I glanced at my watch. It was only four, but looked well on towards evening. Low overhead heavy clouds raced southwards. I reckoned it was no more than two miles to the river. The lone hill in the distance, in whose vicinity we had made our encampment, served as our guide. We no longer had fears of losing our way. If the worst came to the worst we would only get there later than we had expected. But then we walked right into a large lake and had to walk round it. It was very long. We went to the left of it and came to a new watercourse some hundred paces away. It was at right angles to the lake. We had to turn back and were soon struggling again through a bog. We tried our luck and turned right. But water appeared underfoot, and all we saw ahead of us were large puddles. Clearly, we had lost our way. The whole thing was beginning to look grim. I suggested turning back and finding the long strip of solid ground that had brought us to the island. Dersu shared my opinion. We doubled back, but our efforts to find a route of escape failed.

The wind fell, and the roar of Lake Hanka became clearly audible. The daylight was failing, and snow-flakes fluttered in the air. The calm lasted for only a few minutes. Then came the blizzard.

"We're stranded here for the night," I thought, and suddenly it struck me that there was no fire-wood—no trees or shrubs, nothing save water and grass. A panic seized me.

"What shall we do?" I asked Dersu.

"I am very afraid," he replied.

The implications of our predicament dawned on me then. We would have to spend the night in the blizzard without fire or warm clothing. Everything depended on Dersu. If anyone could save us, it was he.

"Listen, captain!" he addressed me. "Listen properly! We must work very quick. If not—we die. We must quickly cut grass."

I asked no questions. One thing was clear: "We must quickly cut grass." We flung off all our trappings and set to work with feverish haste. In the time it took me to cut an armful of grass Dersu cut so much that he could scarcely hold it in both his arms. The gale blew hard, almost knocking us off our feet. Hoar-frost formed on my clothes. We no sooner put an armful of grass on the ground than the snow covered it. Dersu gave explicit orders to refrain from cutting grass at designated points, and was furious when I ignored his instruction.

"You don't know!" he shouted. "Do what I say. I know!"

He took the straps of our rifles, his belt, and a piece of string that I found in my pocket and stuffed them all under his shirt. It had grown considerably darker and colder. Visibility improved somewhat owing to the carpet of snow on the ground, and I saw Dersu working away with astounding vigour. Every time I stopped to rest he drove me on. Fear and indignation mingled in his voice, and I took up the knife obediently again. Snow powdered the back of my shirt. It melted, and rivulets of cold water ran down my spine.

We worked away for over an hour. The searing wind and the snow cut the face painfully. My hands froze.

I breathed on them, and in doing so inadvertently dropped my knife. Dersu bellowed indignantly:

"Work! Work for your life!"

I told him I had lost my knife.

"Tear the grass with your hands," he shouted, straining to raise his voice above the whining wind. Mechanically, almost unconsciously, I began breaking reeds with my hands. They cut my fingers, but I was afraid to stop working, and carried on until I was entirely exhausted. Circles swam before my eyes, my teeth chattered as in a fever. My wet clothes froze stiff and crackled in the cold. I felt drowsy. "So that is how people freeze to death"—flashed across my mind. I was in a stupor and have no idea how long that state lasted. I only remember someone shaking me by the shoulder. On opening my eyes, I saw Dersu standing over me.

"Kneel," he ordered. I stood on all fours. Dersu covered me with his tarpaulin, and piled grass on top of it. Instantly, I felt warmer. Melting snow dribbled down my back. Dersu walked round me, trampling down the snow.

I fell into a stupor again. Then I heard Dersu's voice above the whistling of the blizzard:

"Move up."

I made a desperate effort to do as he bid me. The Gold crept in under the tarpaulin, stretched himself out at my side and covered the two of us with his leather jacket. I felt his fur socks on my feet.

"Thanks, Dersu," I said. "Cover yourself properly."

"Never mind, captain," he replied. "The danger is over. I tie the grass properly. It keep the wind out."

The deeper the snow-drift that covered us, the warmer it grew in our improvised lodge. The drip-drip of melting snow ceased. The wind screeched like a witch outside, like a thousand whistles blown at the same time, like church bells ringing, and requiems sung for the dead. A vision of people dancing rose before my eyes, there was a sense of dropping into an abyss, down and down, until I plunged into a protracted sleep. We slept for about twelve hours. When I awoke it was dark and quiet. Suddenly I realized that I was alone.

"Dersu!" I shouted in a panic.

"Bear!" he returned from outside. "You, bear! Come out! Must go back."

I clambered out quickly and involuntarily put my hand up to my eyes. The countryside was garbed in a mantle of sparkling white. The air, frosty and pure, was transparent. Ragged clouds floated across the sky, affording glimpses of blue. It was still glum and dark, but there was something in the air suggestive of the sun. The grass, beaten down by the snow, lay on the ground in strands. Dersu gathered up several armfuls of yellow reeds and made a small fire, drying my footwear on it.

Now I saw why Dersu had ordered me to leave the grass untouched in certain places. He had twisted it with his belts, straps and strings, and had secured it over our shelter so the wind would not blow it away. The first thing I did was to thank Dersu for saving my life.

"We go together," he replied, "work together. No need to thank me."

And changing the subject, he added:

"Tonight many men died."

By now I knew that the "men" Dersu meant this time were birds.

We disarranged our grass shelter, slung our rifles over our backs, and went to look again for the strip of land that would lead us back to our camp. It turned out that we

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had spent the night in its immediate vicinity. On crossing the swamp we walked a bit of the way towards Lake Hanka, and then turned east to the Lefu.

The steppe appeared lifeless and deserted after the blizzard. The geese, ducks, gulls and other birds were out of sight. Snow-covered swamps lay white against the brownish-yellow setting of grassland. The wet soil was frozen, and carried our weight, so our progress was rapid. We soon came to the river, and an hour later reached the encampment.

Olentyev and Marchenko had been undisturbed by our absence. They thought we had found a dwelling on the lakeside and had stayed there overnight. I changed my shoes, had tea and lay down by the fire. Dersu slept on the other side of it. Marchenko cooked the evening meal and then roused us. The next morning was bitterly cold. The creek froze. There was sludge on the river. It took us the whole day to cross its various arms. We often drifted into blind water alleys, and had to retrace our course.

When leaving our last encampment Dersu asked Olentyev to help him pull the boat out on the bank. Carefully, he wiped the sand off its sides. Then he turned it bottom up and put it on rollers. I knew he was doing it because some day some "man" might have need of it.

We left the Lefu in the morning and arrived in the village of Dmitrovka in the afternoon of the same day. It was on the other side of the Ussuri Railway. When crossing the railway tracks, Dersu stopped, bent down to finger the rails, looked both ways, and said:

"Hm! I heard people talk about it."

In the village we were given lodgings, but the Gold, as was his wont, slept out in the open. I missed him and went to look for him.

The night was dark, but the snow on the ground improved the visibility. There were fires in all the cottages, and the smoke curled upwards in thin whisps from the chimneys. The lights from the houses illuminated the snow in the village street. I saw a burning blaze on the outskirts of the village near a brook, and guessed that it was Dersu's encampment. The Gold was sitting by the fire, sunk in reverie.

"Let's have tea in the hut," I suggested.

He did not reply, and, in his turn, posed a question:

"Where you go tomorrow?"

I said Chernigovka, from where we would return to Vladivostok, and invited him to come with us. I added that we were planning another taiga expedition soon, and offered to put him on the payroll. We sat in silence, thinking. I do not know what thoughts passed through his mind. As for me, sorrow gripped my heart at the prospect of parting with Dersu. I began telling him about the comforts and advantages of city life. He listened attentively, but finally sighed and said:

"No, thank you, captain. I cannot go Vladivostok. What could I do there? Cannot hunt, cannot trap sable; living in the city, I shall soon die."

I sensed the truth of his words.

Dersu fell silent. Maybe he was weighing in his mind what he ought to do. Some time later, in reply to his own thoughts, as it were, he muttered, pointing east:

"Tomorrow I go. Four suns I go, come to the Daubiho; then go to Ulaho, then to Futsing, Sikhota-alin, and to the sea. I hear the seaside is very rich: plenty-plenty sable and deer."

I had become attached to Dersu in that short space of time, and was sorry to part with him.

The first thing I thought of the next morning was that Dersu was leaving us. After breakfast I thanked our host, and went out into the street.

The men were ready to leave. Dersu was with them. He had fitted himself out for a long journey. His knapsack was solidly packed, the belt tightly girded. About a mile out of Dmitrovka he stopped. The sad moment of parting had arrived.

"Farewell, Dersu," said I, shaking his hand. "God bless you. I shall never forget what you have done for me. Farewell! Perhaps, we shall meet again some day."

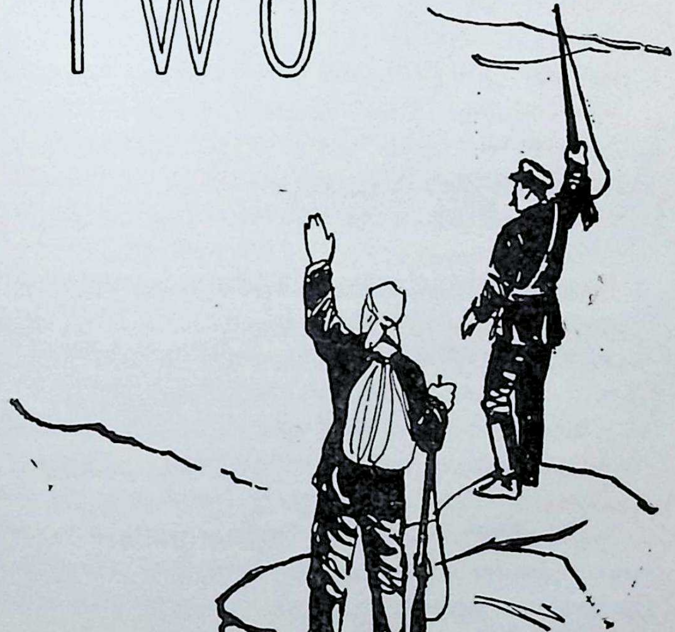
Dersu took leave of the riflemen, nodded his head to me, and went off into the shrubs on the left. We stood rooted to the spot, watching him go. A small hillock rose some two hundred yards away, overgrown with shrubs. Dersu reached it within five minutes. His figure with the knapsack on his back and rifle in hand, stood out in bold relief against the light blue sky. The sun, bright golden, rose from behind the mountains that moment and cast a halo round the Gold. On climbing to the top of the hillock he stopped, turned our way, waved, and vanished behind the elevation. It was as though something snapped inside me. I felt I had just lost someone near and dear.

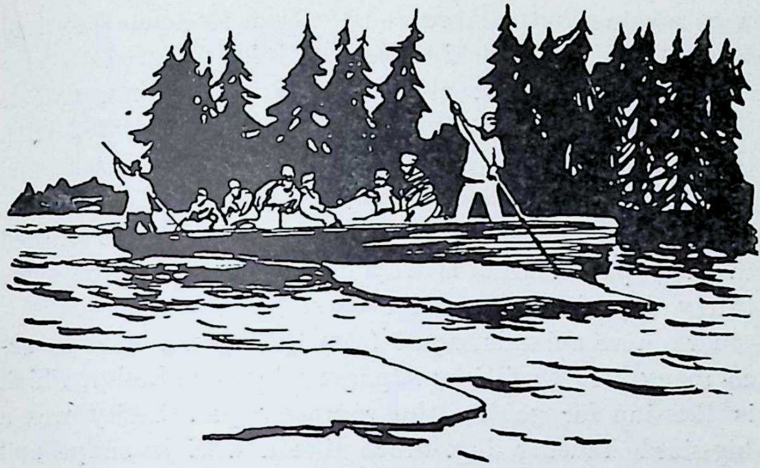
"Fine chap," Marchenko said.

"Not many like him," Olentyev chimed in.

"Farewell, Dersu," thought I. "You saved my life, and I'll never forget it."

# PART
# TWO





## 6. RIVERS, FORESTS AND MARSHES

FOUR YEARS PASSED. It was proposed that I organize an expedition to the Sikhota-alin Mountain Range, the Trans-Ussuri coast from Olga Bay as far north as time would permit, and the upper reaches of the Ussuri and Iman rivers.

Only scanty information was available at the time about the central portion of the Sikhota-alin. And as for the coastline north of Olga Bay, there were only fragmentary data from naval officers who occasionally called at those parts to sound the coves and bays. My group was made up of selected riflemen, chiefly Siberians. True, the men were a somewhat sombre and taciturn lot, but they had been steeled to hardships from childhood.

We meant to take along twelve pack-horses, and it was highly important that the men get acquainted with them, and that the latter, in their turn, get accustomed to the men. The riflemen had to be trained to tend the horses, to saddle them, and the horses had to be trained to carry packs. That is why our group assembled some thirty days before we were to set out.

Two more animals, apart from the horses, were to accompany the expedition: Alpa, my dog, and Leshy, which is Russian for goblin, the company pet. Leshy was a big-sized hunting dog, much like a wolf in shape and colour.

Shmakovka, a station south of the railway bridge over the Ussuri, was picked as our point of departure. All was ready on May 14, and the next day the company with the pack-horses was sent there by rail, while all the other members of the expedition left Khabarovsk the following day.

On May 18 the riflemen were given a day-off to see to their own affairs. They fitted themselves out with untas, the warm fur footwear of Siberian backwoodsmen, sewed knee-pads, and overhauled their ammunition belts.

On May 19 we all rose early, but it was well on in the morning when we pushed off. That was only to be expected. It always takes unusually long to make the first start. Later on the men grow accustomed to a certain routine, each knows his horse and pack, each knows what things he is charged with, what to pack first and what last, and what things may be needed on the march.

The muddy road between the villages of Shmakovka and Uspenskaya ran over a series of hills. All its bridges were ripped down by the spring floods, and the crossing of the several streams, which were rushing torrents at this time of the year, presented many difficulties.

Our arrival in Uspenskaya was regarded by the villagers as an extraordinary event. Children stopped their games and ran into the street. Troubled female faces peered out of the windows, and the menfolk left their field work and stood watching our company filing by.

In the evening we met some of the veteran settlers. They told us about themselves, about the road ahead, and gave us valuable advice.

Next day we continued on our way. The road we took led straight to the Ussuri River. The valley was flooded. The elevations looked like islets. The peasants who came along as guides said that all overland communications with the neighbouring villages had ceased entirely during the floods, and that they travelled by boat only.

We put our heads together and decided to go upriver until we should come to a place where the stream had only one channel and we could attempt to swim across with our horses.

The day gave promise of rain, but the weather cleared towards ten o'clock. We found what we were looking for. Some three miles away all the watercourses merged with the river while the numerous elevations, rising above the flood, allowed us to approach the river-bank. But for that we should have had to skirt the marshes and descend into the valley near the Kabarga Mountain.

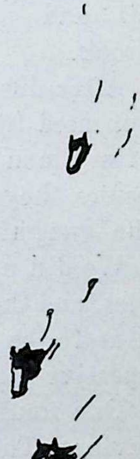
The horses had grown to know each other. All we had to do was lead the one in front, and the others followed readily. The riflemen took turns herding them, and prodded them on whenever they strayed or lagged behind.

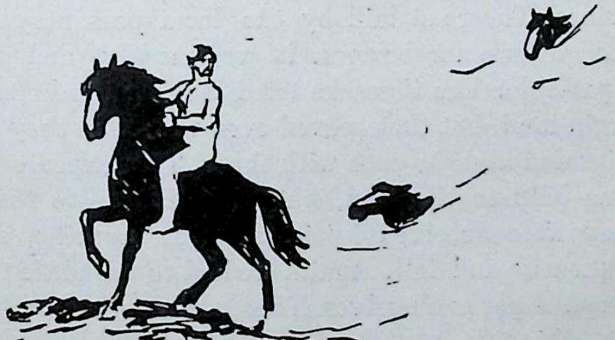
Crossing from one elevation to another and by-passing bogs, we soon came to a forest sprawling on the river-bank. As luck would have it, the local Chinese had a boat. It leaked, and was much like a sieve; but, nonetheless, it was a vessel and would serve our purpose excellently. It took us about an hour to put it into shape. We stuffed up the cracks in its bottom, nailed down some of its boards, and drove in pegs with rope loops to replace the missing rowlocks. First we rowed across the saddles, and then the men. It was now the turn of the horses. They refused to enter the water on their own, and someone on horseback would have to lead them. Kozhevnikov, a Cossack, volunteered for the hazardous undertaking. He stripped, mounted the liveliest of our horses, and plunged bravely into the water. The men drove the other horses in after him. As soon as Kozhevnikov's mount lost the bottom underfoot, the Cossack dismounted and swam alongside, clutching its mane. The other horses followed. We could see from the bank how Kozhevnikov cheered his horse on, stroking its neck. The animals snorted as they swam, dilating their nostrils and baring their teeth. The current kept pulling them down-river, but they were making rapid headway.

Would Kozhevnikov succeed in reaching the other bank at the desired spot? Below it the bank, overgrown with shrubs and trees, was steep and littered with fallen timber. Some ten minutes later his horse felt bottom. The Cossack remounted it and rode up the bank on horseback.

Some of the horses were weaker than others, swam slower, and the herd stretched out in a line across the river. When Kozhevnikov's horse reached the opposite bank, the hindmost of them was still in midstream. The current, we saw, would sweep it away. It was exerting all its strength to hold its own against the current, yet it was being pulled along farther and farther. Kozhevnikov noticed it too. When all the other horses safely reached the bank; he galloped down-river. He chose a place clear of fallen timber, and stood on the edge of the river among the shrubs in full sight of the swimming horse, calling it by name; but the noise of the river drowned out his voice. Kozhevnikov's white horse cocked its ears, raised high its head, and looked at the water. A loud neighing drifted over the river. The swimming horse heard it and changed its course. A few minutes later it came to the bank. When it recovered its breath the Cossack put a bridle on it, and led it back to the herd. In the meanwhile, the boat ferried across all the remaining members of the expedition and their loads.

After the crossing the expedition made its way round various swamps and hastened towards the mountains.





On coming to firm ground men and beasts cheered up. But soon we again had to wade across a stream running down a narrow but very marshy valley. The men jumped from mound to mound, but it was an ordeal for the horses. They were a pitiful sight, sinking belly-deep in the bog and losing their footing time and time again. Some were bogged down so thoroughly that we had to come to their assistance, relieve them of their packs, and carry the latter ourselves.

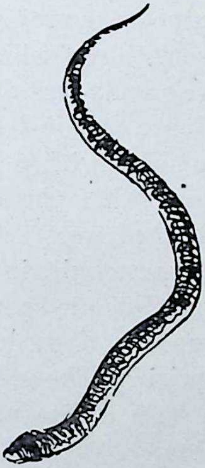
The day was fast waning when we finally got all the horses through the marshes. We marched on for a bit and pitched camp at the edge of a sparkling brook.

After dusk we had a campfire sing-song. A concertina appeared from nowhere. Looking at the untroubled faces of my men one would never say that a mere two hours before they had floundered about, spent and weary, in the quagmire.

We did not break camp next day. The horses needed a rest, and there was the gear to be dried and the pack-saddles to be overhauled. The men got down to their respective jobs at the first hint of dawn.

Our route now lay across mountains and five marshy ravines. The road laid by the local peasantry had neither gutters nor bridges. It was muddy, and virtually impassable. The Cossacks tried leading the horses across virgin land, but that proved even worse. So they cut osier twigs and laid the path with them. This expedient was of some help to the men, but of little use to the beasts. They were deceived by its seeming security, stumbled frequently and fell. Again, we had to unsaddle them and carry the packs ourselves. Then, at last, the marshes were left behind.

Something held up the horses, and we marched on ahead, coming shortly to an old, tumbledown lodge at the edge of a forest. Here we sat on some boulders and waited for the pack-horses to catch us up. Suddenly a dark streak caught our eye some distance away. The men hurried towards it and discovered a big-sized reptile gliding swiftly through the grass towards a cluster of shrubs. The men ran by its side, but, frightened by its dimensions, did not venture near it. A minute later it reached a hollow fallen tree-trunk and slid into it. One of the men snatched up a stick and poked it into the hollow. We heard an intense buzzing. Bumblebees came flying out of the tree-trunk. We had obviously disturbed their hive in the hollow, and wondered what the snake was doing there. Had it crept inside the hive, and if so, why had the bees failed to raise an alarm, as they did when we poked our stick into it? We were all keen to know the answer and the men cleaved the trunk in two with an axe. It was rotten and split without much effort on our part. The snake twisted and weaved, vainly seeking concealment in the remnants of the trunk. The men hacked off its



head and pulled it out into the daylight. It was a black racer more than six feet long and four inches in circumference.

The hollow, which was narrower at the opening than at the foot, had obviously served the snake as a nest, for we found birds' down in it, and rags of fur, dry grass and the serpent's cast-off slough. The beehive was closer to the exit.

When it came and went the racer had to slide past the hive, but the snake and bees, it appeared, got along famously.

We examined our prey with the greatest interest.

"It has something inside it!" exclaimed one of the men.

The snake's body was dilated, and we wanted to know what this large reptile fed on. To our surprise it was a fairly large snipe with a longish bill.

Natives said that the Ussuri land-snake was fond of birds. It climbed trees and attacked them in their nests, particularly those built in tree hollows. That was conceivable enough. But our specimen had managed to catch a bird that ran and flew, and had swallowed it. That was indeed surprising. The snipe's long bill, it would seem, must have been a disconcerting impediment to the racer's digestion.

Preoccupied with the snake, we did not notice the approaching thunder-cloud. It cast a dark shadow on the earth, and the men hastened to the horses peacefully grazing along the roadside. The Golds, whom we met on our march and who were now with us, said there were two Chinese lodges near by, where we should find shelter from the imminent cloud-burst.

The thunder-cloud was approaching at great speed. Its foremost edge was whitish-grey and curling, and smaller clouds raced by its side, as though giving chase.

We were caught in the rain on our way to the promised shelters; as a matter of fact it began to rain the minute we resumed our march. A few large drops fell at first, followed by a veritable downpour.

Usually such downpours are short-lived. But not so in the Ussuri backwoods. There, cloud-bursts often presage a drawn-out rainfall.

The thunder-storm passed as quickly as it began, but the sun remained hidden behind billowing clouds that stretched to the horizon. A fine drizzle began, and a fog settled over the countryside, now driven by the wind to enshroud the mountain tops, now descending to the valley, then rising again and causing the drizzle to turn into a rain.

The usually shallow Wanhow River swelled menacingly and left its banks. Its waters reached the forest. The men advanced across the flooded tract easily enough. It was the horses again that had the worst of it. They groped along blindly and often tumbled into holes and pitfalls.

A large meadow opened before us as we reached the edge of the forest. At its opposite end we glimpsed the sectarian village of Zagornaya nestling at the foot of the mountains. But it was not easy to get to it. The bridge built by the villagers across the river was washed away. It took us more than two hours to repair it, oblivious of the rain that drenched us to the skin.

A woman's face appeared in one of the windows as we finally entered the village; then a man came to the door. He was the village elder. On learning who we were, he invited us to stop at his house. The Cossacks, miserably wet, quickly unsaddled the pack-horses.

Our host, a man of about forty-five, was of medium height and had intelligent brown eyes. He wore a flowing beard and had his hair cropped in a circle, so it was no longer at the back of his head than in front. His jack-boots were low-heeled and the flowing calico shirt, worn in the fashion of Russians over his velveteen trousers, was loosely belted with a braided girdle.

The house consisted of two rooms, one of them with a large Russian stove. The floor was scrubbed clean, the wooden ceilings were neatly planed and the walls thoroughly caulked. There was a set of neatly curtained shelves for the kitchen utensils and a shining copper wash-stand. Two long benches stood against the walls, the table in the corner was covered with a white table-cloth, and an image-case hung over it, its ancient-looking icons portraying saints with large heads, swarthy visages and thin long hands.

The sectarian's family consisted of his wife and two small children. The woman was garbed in a white blouse and a colourful sarafan,* girdled above the waist and held up by narrow shoulder-straps crossed at the back. She had a kerchief tied about her head like a headband, and as we entered she bowed to us decorously in traditional Russian fashion.

We started throwing off our things and spattered the floor with mud. This embarrassed us, but our host hastened to our aid.

"Never you mind it," he said jovially, "the women will clean it up. Can't expect a man to come out of the taiga neat and tidy in weather like this."

Fresh bread,honey, eggs and milk appeared on the table a few minutes later, and we pitched into them ravenously.

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* *Sarafan* — a Russian national dress worn by peasant women.— *Tr.*

The rest of the day was spent in questioning the villagers about the way to Koksharovka. It was not to be reached by any of the roads, and only a local sectarian, one Panachov, knew the way to it across the mountains.

The elder sent for him. Panachov appeared immediately—a man of more than forty, with an unkempt, shaggy beard, which gave him the look of one who had just risen from bed and had not had the time to comb it. It was apparent from the first that he was a kind and harmless soul. As he came into the hut he thrice made the sign of the cross before the image-case and bowed low each time, his fingers touching the floor. His long hair continuously got in his eyes and he shook his head every minute to throw it back.

"Greetings!" he said quietly, retreating to the door, and began kneading his cap with both hands.

He agreed willingly to guide us to Koksharovka.

"Very well, I'll go," he said simply, and that utterance of his held a readiness to be of service, submission, and the consciousness that he alone knew the way.

We decided to proceed the next day, provided it stopped raining. Panachov went home, and we conversed with our host. Merzlyakov, one of my companions, was interested in antique books. When he learned that our host had a number of them he asked for permission to see them.

"You're welcome to them," the sectarian replied, and added: "That's if you know Slavic." He then produced them one by one.

Outdoors the weather raged, the wind and rain lashed at the windows, and we heard pitiful sounds, as though a dog was howling somewhere, or someone was groaning up in the garret. The noise of the storm lulled us to sleep.

The next morning (May 31) I ran to the window at the first hint of dawn. The rain had stopped but the weather was dull and damp. A fog enveloped the mountains, and the valley, the forest and the structures on the river-bank were only faintly visible.

We were ready to go on. There was nothing to hold us now that the rain had stopped. But one thing delayed our departure: the bread was not baked.

At about eight a chorus of village cocks crowed merrily.

"It'll clear up. Hear the cocks? That's a sure sign," the Cossacks said.

Domestic fowl are highly sensitive to changes in the weather. True, they often err. Sometimes cocks start their concert at the slightest hint of brighter weather. But this time they made no mistake. The fog lifted soon, patches of blue sky appeared, and we glimpsed the sun.

At ten our company, headed by Panachov, abandoned the village. We were to cross the ridge that separated the Daubiho from the Ulaho and reach the mouth of the Futsing by a river as yet nameless.

In due course the day brightened. The fog vanished, rivulets of rain-water ran down the slopes, the rain-drenched flowers picked up their heads, and moths and butterflies reappeared.

Panachov followed a path marked by axe-cuts in the tree-trunks. We had to clear our way with hatchets. The Ussuri taiga is virginal, primeval timberland. The trees are densely overgrown with grapevine and lianas, and kishmish—a variety of vine yielding wild stoneless grapes, the stems of which are sometimes as thick as a man's arm.

Panachov had told us that unencumbered by pack-horses and loads he usually covered the distance between Zagornaya and Koksharovka in a day. By a day he meant the time between dawn and dusk. We had draught animals, however, and our progress was relatively slow. So we expected to make Koksharovka in two days.

At about noon we called a halt. The men instantly threw off their clothing and helped each other to get the ticks out of their skin. Panachov was in a bad way. He was scratching himself unintermittently, for the arachnids had lodged themselves in his beard and neck. Done with their own ticks, the Cossacks turned their attention upon the dogs. The clever animals submitted patiently to the painful operation. But the horses would have none of it: they shook their heads obstreperously and would not stand still. The Cossacks had a difficult time getting the ticks out of their lips and eyelids.

After tea Panachov again took the lead, followed by riflemen with axes, and fifteen minutes later the main body started out as well.

There was a slight drizzle at about five, but it stopped before dark, and the sky cleared. A tender light spread through the forest. That was the sun's last smile of the day. The taiga, on the point of dozing off, suddenly came to life. Striped squirrels jumped about animatedly, and cries of the oriole and the hoopoe resounded. Then the light faded gradually, retreating before the shades of night. The flames of our campfire turned a bright hue. The men crowded about it, only Panachov sitting a few paces away, eating his bread in silence and gathering up the crumbs meticulously, after the manner of sectarians. The Cossacks were opening their packs, setting up mosquito-nets, and cooking dinner. Some of them had taken off all their clothes, searching in them for ticks and cursing without restraint.

"How far is it to Koksharovka?" asked one of them.

"Who knows?" the sectarian replied. "No one has ever tried measuring distances in the taiga, you know. We ought to make it tomorrow."

There was a distinct implication of uncertainty in that "ought to."

"D'you know these parts well?" the Cossack continued.

"Not well enough. I made the trip twice and never lost my way. We'll make it, I guess, God willing."

The next day was the first of July. Our company broke up into three groups. An advance party marched under Panachov, followed closely by the pack-horses. The rest of us made up the rear. Our progress was extremely slow. We had to stop frequently and wait until the riflemen cut a path through the dense forest. At about midday the horses in front of us stopped.

"Move on," the men in the rear shouted impatiently.

"Wait! The sectarian's lost the axe-marks," the vanguard replied.

"And where is he?"

"He went on ahead to find the way."

Some twenty minutes later Panachov returned. One glance at him told us how things stood. His face was perspiring, his eyes confused, and the hair dishevelled.

"Well, what about the axe-marks?" he was asked.

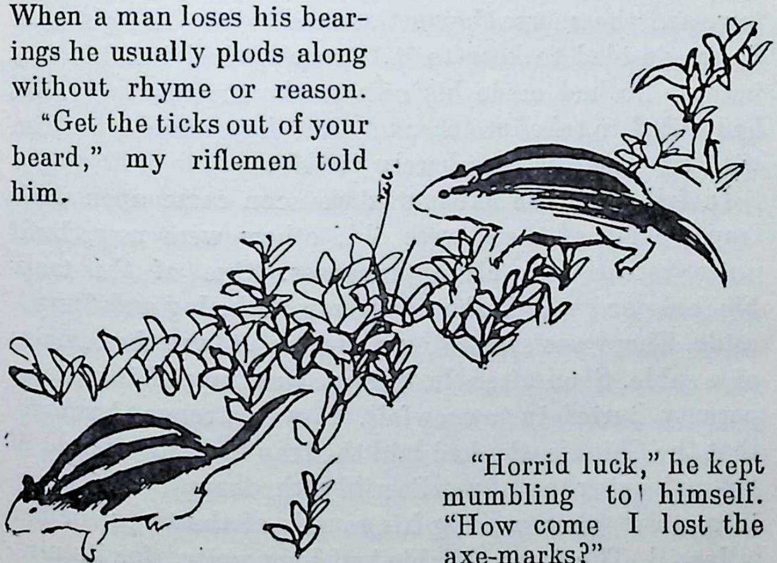
"Can't find them," the sectarian replied. "They are probably on our left. We've got to go north-east."

We moved on. Panachov no longer walked confidently on. He would turn left, then the other way, then he would double back, so that the sun, which had been shining in our faces, warmed our backs. He was obviously trusting to chance. I tried questioning him, but that only added to his confusion. We put our heads together and someone spoke of going back to find the axe-marks, but Panachov insisted he would find his bearings as soon as we came to an elevation and he took a look round.

The horses were badly in need of a rest. We unsaddled them and allowed them to graze. The Cossacks made tea, while Panachov and my assistant climbed the neighbouring mountain peak. They were away for thirty minutes. My assistant told us he saw nothing but wooded mountains. There was a look of utter embarrassment on Panachov's face, and though he assured us that he knew these parts there was a strong trace of doubt in his voice.

No sooner did we resume our march than we stumbled into a gully, and it was only towards evening that we found our way out of it. Panachov led us erratically, up steep slopes, along hillsides, and down into the valley again. When a man loses his bearings he usually plods along without rhyme or reason.

"Get the ticks out of your beard," my riflemen told him.



"Horrid luck," he kept mumbling to himself. "How come I lost the axe-marks?"

We took stock of our food reserves. When leaving Zagornaya we had had a three-day supply of bread. That meant we still had food for the next day, but what if we did not come to Koksharovka? The decision was to go due east, and to pay no attention to Panachov.

We were on our feet at the first hint of dawn the next day. Under the circumstances haste was imperative.

Some two miles from the encampment we came upon a set of old, gnarled axe-marks.

"Whose are they?" Merzlyakov asked.

"Chinese," Panachov replied curtly.

"So there are Chinese in your taiga?" the Cossacks asked him.

"They're everywhere in the taiga," the sectarian retorted. "You'll find them wherever you go."

The marks, made at short intervals, were easy to follow, and the course they set seemed to be the right one. So we decided to keep to it. Panachov had lost his way because he had made his own marks too sparingly. He had failed to take into account that they would grow dim with time and become barely visible.

In following the axe-marks we soon came upon sable traps. Some of them were old; others were new, built quite recently to all appearances. One of the traps blocked our path. Kozhevnikov raised the log and flung it aside. There was something under it. It was the remains of a sable. Soon after the animal was trapped it was apparenty buried in a snowfall. It was strange, however, that the Chinese who had laid the trap had not visited it before leaving the taiga. Possibly, the trapper was caught in a storm when making his rounds of the traps, or had fallen ill. The trapped sable had long waited for its master, and in spring, when the snows melted, the crows pecked the valuable carnivore to pieces, leaving only the bones and rags of fur.

I thought of Dersu. Had he been with us he would surely have known why the sable had not been removed from the trap. What was more, he would surely have found the way and helped us out of our predicament.

Towards midday we scaled a wooded mountain range and on discussing our plight decided to descend into the valley and follow the river. The eastern slope of the range was steep, littered with fallen timber and boulders. We had to descend in zigzags, and that took much time. The stream soon turned south; we made up our minds to strike out across virgin land and had to cross several mountain spurs.

Panachov walked in advance as before, maintaining a stolid silence, while we plodded in his wake. It made no difference any longer. The mistake could not be rectified, and nothing remained but to follow the stream until it would bring us to the Ulaho. I again took stock of our food stores. There were rusks only for the evening meal and I advised the cook to distribute short rations.

Midges, popularly known as punkies, made their first appearance before dusk. The Ussuri midge is a veritable scourge of the taiga. Its sting draws blood, and itches terribly. The more the victim scratches it, the more bothersome it becomes. When the midges come en masse it is unwise to expose the face for even a single minute. The punky gets in the eyes, swarms in the hair and ears, penetrates up the sleeves, and inflicts painful bites on the neck. The face swells up as in erysipelas.

But in two or three days the body acquires immunity, and the swelling subsides.

The men had nets to protect them, but the horses had a bad time of it. The midges swarmed about their lips and eyelids. The wretched animals shook their heads, but were helpless against their tiny tormentors.

The best thing against midges is a net. But not a wire net. The wire gets hot in the sun. And it is better to suffer from punkies than gasp for hot air that is, moreover, saturated with one's own exhalations. Muslin nets are unreliable. They catch at twigs and branches, and tear. The insects penetrate through the holes, and to get rid of them then one would have to take off one's headgear. A hair net is the best. It is sufficiently strong and does not get as hot in the sun as the metal netting. Some recommend vaseline. I tried it, and can safely say that it is of little help. Firstly, the midges stick to the vaseline and irritate you as they struggle to get free. Secondly, vaseline melts and is washed off by the perspiration. Various aromatic salves, such as the oil of cloves, are still worse. They penetrate into the pores and sting like a nettle. The best remedy is patience. The punky will drive the impatient to tears.

We showed a big supply of that remedy, and marched on until the sun sank below the horizon. Panachov went off to look round. It was dark when he returned and reported that he had spotted the Ulaho valley from a mountain top and that we should come to the end of the forest by noon of the following day. The men cheered up.

Our evening meal was frugal. The crumbs left over from the rusks were distributed equally.

The next morning, a few minutes after we left our bivouac, we came upon a path. It was an animal trail leading somewhere into the mountains. Panachov followed it. We were on the point of remonstrating, but it turned out that he was right this time. The path brought us to a hunting lodge. The mixed forest gave place to sparse deciduous woodland. Sensing the end of the march, the horses increased their pace. Finally, we glimpsed a clearing and soon arrived at the edge of the forest.

A few minutes later we came to the river and saw Koksharovka on the opposite bank. The villagers sent a boat for our saddles and packs. The horses needed no driving. They seemed to sense that a plentiful meal awaited them on the other side. They entered the water of their own accord and swam across.

The men were played out, and so were the horses. We stopped at Koksharovka a full three days.

## 7. THROUGH THE TAIGA

We left Koksharovka on June 6. Our horses had had a good rest and put their best leg foremost in spite of all the horse-flies and midges, whose swarms had not shrunk in the past few days. The insects were particularly hard on those who made up the rear. The bulk of the midges kept in the tail of our company, and this compelled us to take turns at the back.

From Koksharovka the road winds along the right bank of the Ulaho, and turns off into the mountains where the river skirts a formidable cluster of cliffs. But it soon returns to the valley.

Rhododendrons were in full bloom and the rocks were purple with them.

The Futsing valley was chiefly meadowland. Old oaks, ramulose lime-trees and gnarled black poplars were thinly scattered over it. The squat mountains on either side were covered with mixed woods in which firs and spruces predominated.

The wild beauty of the valley was softened by the presence of man. Much like quails hiding from the hunter, grey Chinese dwellings gleamed here and there among the trees. They looked cosy. There was an atmosphere of peace, quiet and human industry. Grain fields and vegetable gardens stretched away from the fanzas. All kinds of things grew on them—wheat, maize, foxtail millet, oats, poppies, beans, tobacco, and numerous other crops that I could not identify. French beans, potatoes, horse radish, pumpkins, melons, cabbages, lettuce, turnips, cucumbers, tomatoes, onions and peas were cultivated nearer to the huts. The fields were dotted with the blue-clad figures of Chinese peasants. They stopped work and followed us with their eyes. Our armed group obviously alarmed them, while the pack-animals in our midst must have told them that we came from afar and still had a long way before us.

I headed for one of the dwellings. An old fogey was toiling away in the vegetable garden. He was weeding the beds and groaned every time he bent his back. He was obviously having a hard time of it, but did not wish to live in indolence and be a burden to others. Another old man—somewhat younger than he—was working at his side. He was dressing up the vegetables, straightening their leaves and clipping them down to a uniform size. As we drew level the two old men greeted us in their own tongue and, wiping the sweat off their faces with a dirty rag, shuffled along in our wake.

The dogs, scenting strangers, set up an unholy row and made a rush at us. The master of the house came to see what the racket was about and ordered his labourers to help us unsaddle our horses.

A Chinese fanza is a unique structure. It has adobe walls, a common gable roof made of reeds, and papered lattice windows stretching across practically the entire front wall; there are no windows in the side walls, or at the back. The doors have no locks, and are only meant to keep out the dogs, not people.

There are squat little stone hearths on either side of the door, with iron cauldrons puttied into them. The smoke ducts from the stoves lead off along the walls to heat the brick k'angs. The bedsteads are about seven feet wide and covered with straw matting. The Chinese always sleep naked, their legs turned towards the back wall.

A wooden partition divided the dwelling into two. The smaller part was occupied by the master and his partner, the bigger—by their labourers. A brazier with sand and ashes was perched on a tripod in the middle of the hut. Live coals from the stove were put in it after the food was cooked and the k'angs were warm enough. Whenever the Chinese had need merely to warm their meals they made a fire in the brazier. All the things out of man's reach were covered with a thick layer of soot.

Our host spread a new quilted blanket on the k'ang, pulled up a short-legged table and poured each one of us a mug of tea. Chinese tea is pale yellow and weak, but surprisingly fragrant; it is drunk unsweetened, and if taken with sugar, has an unpleasant taste.

"Any more people coming? How many people you have?" were the first questions the Chinese asked.

I did not like their questioning at first, thinking that perhaps the Chinese harboured ill intentions, but soon discovered that they merely wanted to know how many people were to be served dinner.

We made ourselves comfortable. The Chinese sought to indulge our every wish. After a sumptuous meal of boiled chicken, eggs, and potatoes fried in bean oil, I went to inspect the barns.

One of the structures was an alcohol distillery, whose one half housed a mill consisting of two millstones, of which the bottom one was stationary. The mill was horse-driven. The animal, blindfolded, walked round and round, turning the uppermost millstone. The flour was separated from the bran by sifting. The sieve was installed in a cabinet operated by foot. The sieve-operator also watched the horse and poured grain on the millstone. The grain products and other sundries were stored in an adjacent storehouse.

In the yard of the neighbouring fanza the Chinese were cooking antlers. I went to see how they did it. A cauldron of water was perched on three boulders over a large fire. The water in the cauldron was kept hot, but was not allowed to boil. The new antlers of a deer were tied with a string to a wooden ladle, which a Chinese dipped in the water and quickly withdrew to cool, blowing on them the while to disperse the steam. The procedure was repeated over and over again, day after day, until the antlers grew dark and solid. In this way they could be preserved for many years. If held in the hot water for more than two or three seconds, they cracked and became valueless.

The day was on the wane when I returned to our fanza. As the sun sank to the horizon the Chinese stopped work and slowly shuffled off home. The fields lay deserted.

Back at the hut I tackled my diary. Two Chinese looked over my shoulder. They watched my hand closely and marvelled at my cursive writing. I happened to be writing mechanically that moment, my eyes averted from the paper, and a shout of admiration escaped their lips. A few others came up, and in five minutes all the inmates of the dwelling were crowded round me, asking me to repeat the trick.

A thin kind of maize porridge, a few pickled vegetables and two small dark loaves of wheat bread was all the Chinese labourers had for their evening meal. They squatted round a small table and ate in complete silence. After the meal they turned in.

Next morning, on paying the host, we set out up the Futsing, which at this point describes a sharp horseshoe-like curve. A path across the mountains greatly shortened the way. It scaled two low ridges and crossed a swelling water source.

At midday I ordered a halt at the edge of a brook. After tea I did not wait for the horses and walked on ahead along the path. On the top of a spur the path forked. One branch, apparently in little use, led off to the left while the second, leading straight through the forest, seemed to be a well-beaten track. I chose the latter.

The forest became denser and bigger; I caught glimpses of the blunt tops of cedars and the sharp points of firs, which always lend a sense of gloom to a forest. I climbed effortlessly over one more ridge and descended into the neighbouring valley. A singing brook ran along it. I sank into the grass under a big cedar-tree and scrutinized the undergrowth. Suddenly, monotonous and doleful sounds reached my ears. They were coming nearer, and soon I was able to distinguish the flapping of wings and a hollow cooing overhead. It was a wild east-Siberian turtle-dove. Inadvertently I dropped something, frightening it, and it fled pell-mell into the thicket. Then I recognized the sharp cry of the cedar-bird and soon caught a glimpse of that big-headed, lushly-coloured, clumsy bird. It darted from tree to tree, hulling fir-cones and emitting piercing cries, as though intent on informing the taiga community of the presence of a human intruder.

I grew tired of sitting and decided to turn back to my detachment. Then I heard a rustling—the sound of someone mowing cautiously through the thickets. "Must be a beast," I thought, and cocked my rifle. The rustling came nearer.

I held my breath and strained to see the approaching animal through the thick foliage. Suddenly my heart gave a jump—it was a woodsman. I knew from past experience how dangerous these people were.

In the Ussuri taiga an encounter with a wild beast is far less hazardous than one with a human being. The beast flees at the sight of man, and attacks only if pursued. In such cases both hunter and beast know where they stand. But a human being is a totally different matter. In the taiga God is the only witness and on seeing a fellow-human, man, as a necessary precaution, must first hide and prepare his rifle.

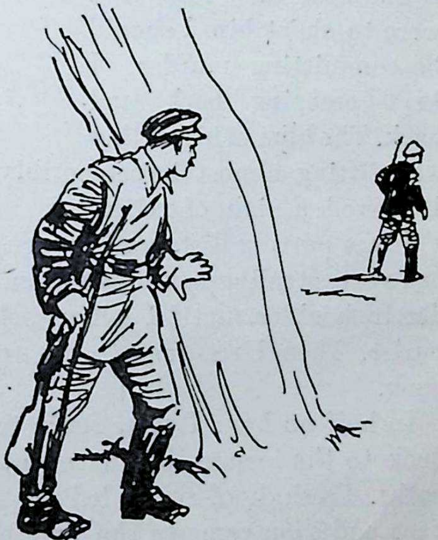
In the taiga everybody is armed—natives, Chinese, Koreans, trappers, and hunters. The trapper and hunter live, almost exclusively, by the fruits of their trade. They have many interesting methods of their own, evolved through years of forest life; they know where to look for game, how to stalk it, and where to look for a wounded animal; they know how to put up the beast quickly and noiselessly, and to imitate animal calls.

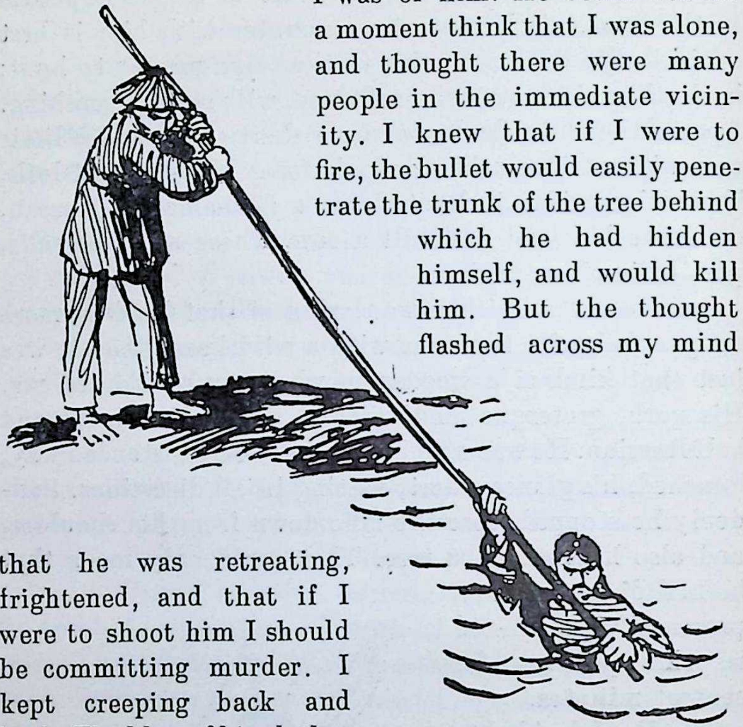
But a woodsman is different. He is as unscrupulous as the hunter is honest. An encounter with him is best avoided. He does not come to the taiga merely to hunt; he is there in quest of profit and will stop at nothing. Apart from the rifle, he carries a short spade and a little case with various acids. He looks for gold, but is not loth, if occasion arises, to hunt down a Chinaman or Korean, or to steal a boat and kill a cow, whose meat he sells, passing it off as venison.

An encounter with a woodsman of that kind is more dangerous by far than one with a wild beast. And it was just that kind of a woodsman who now confronted me. His garb, grotesque and strange, was half Chinese and half Russian. He was walking past me some distance away, hunched, his glances alert, darting in all directions. Suddenly he stopped, tore the rifle down from his shoulder, and also hid behind a tree. That could only mean that he had discovered my presence. We remained in that position for several minutes.

Finally, I decided to retreat, creeping back cautiously through the shrubbery, and a minute later reached another thick tree. The woodsman was also retreating, seeking concealment in the bushes.

I realized that he was as scared of me as





I was of him. He could not for a moment think that I was alone, and thought there were many people in the immediate vicinity. I knew that if I were to fire, the bullet would easily penetrate the trunk of the tree behind which he had hidden himself, and would kill him. But the thought flashed across my mind that he was retreating, frightened, and that if I were to shoot him I should be committing murder. I kept creeping back and back. The blue of his clothes was flitting almost imperceptibly among the trees, and I heaved a sigh of relief.

I was putting distance between myself and the dangerous spot, stealing cautiously from tree to tree, from boulder to boulder, until I felt myself out of the range of a bullet. Then I returned to the trail and walked hastily back.

In half an hour I came again to the forking. Thinking back to the lessons Dersu taught me, I examined both paths. Fresh hoof-marks led to the left. I increased my pace and soon came to the Futsing. There was a Chinese dwelling on the opposite bank, encircled by a paling, where I found my little troop.

The district was known as Yolaiza, and the dwelling was the last peasant farmstead on our route. Beyond it lay the taiga—wild and deserted, coming to life only in winter during sable-trapping time.

The men were waiting for my return. I ordered them to unsaddle the horses and pitch the tents. We had to replenish our food supplies here before striking out into the wilderness.

After a brief rest I went to look at the structures in the neighbourhood of the Chinese dwellings. Coming back I lost my way and came to the Futsing. Here I met two Chinese pearl-divers. One of them stood on the bank and hung on to a pole stuck into the river-bottom. The other dived into the river, where he gathered shells with his right hand and held the pole with his left so the swift current would not carry him away. The diver remained under water for no more than thirty seconds. He could have stayed longer if it had been only a matter of breathing. It was the low temperature of the water that made him rise. He kept his clothes on for the same reason.

I sat on the bank and watched the two men at work. After a dip the diver would warm himself in the sun for five minutes. And since the two took turns, each dived no more than ten times in an hour. In my presence they found only eight shells, of which not one contained a pearl. As a rule, the Chinese said, only one shell in fifty did. During the summer they would find about two hundred pearls, and sell them for 500-600 rubles. The pearl-divers did not confine themselves to the Futsing alone, and roved through the country looking for old, slimy watercourses. The best place for pearls, they said, was the Hwaku River.

Soon the Chinese had enough. They put on dry clothes and drank hot vodka. Then they squatted on the bank and broke the shells with little hammers, examining them for pearls. I remembered seeing mounds of crushed shells on river-banks, whose presence I could not explain at the time. Of course, the pearl-hunting was absolutely predatory. The shells were crushed and abandoned. Out of their eighty shells the Chinese only found two of any value. But as much as I examined them, I could not spot the pearls in them until they were shown to me. They were tiny, shining, grey-coloured growths, and the layer of mother of pearl around them was much brighter and more striking.

After the shells dried the pearl-divers carefully extracted the pearls with their knives and put them away in small leather pouches.

Next day we left Yolaiza at an early hour, guided on our course by a narrow trail, which gradually deteriorated.

Every time I step into a forest extending for hundreds of miles I am overcome by a feeling bordering on awe. Such primeval stretches of forest land are an element in their own right.

The farther we went, the more fallen timber there was. The layer of vegetative soil was not deep in the mountains, the roots did not sink far into the earth rather spreading along the surface. The trees, hence, were not firmly rooted, and easily upset by the wind. That is why the Ussuri taiga is so littered with wind-fallen timber. The uprooted tree stretches its roots to the sky with all the earth and stones clinging to them, such barricades often reaching 15 feet in height. Forest trails always twist and turn, skirting one fallen tree after another. Allowance must always be made for these twists and turns when calculating distances in the taiga, adding about half as much more to any distance between two points given in the map.

In the alluvial soil of the valleys the trees are better rooted. There are forest giants here almost 100 feet high and 15 feet in circumference. Old poplars often serve as dens to bears, and hunters sometimes find that a single hollow houses two or three bears at a time.

The forest in the valleys is so dense in places that its foliage totally shuts out the sky. Semi-darkness reigns in it all day long. It is cool and damp. The dawn and evening twilights in the forest and out in the open do not coincide in time. Whenever even a small cloud blots out the sun the forest turns bleak, and the weather appears dull. But on a clear, sunlit day there is a fascinating, striking beauty in the tree-trunks, the bright green foliage, the shining pine-needles, the flowers, the moss and the many-coloured lichen. Unfortunately, the impression is marred by the midges. Words fail me to describe the torments a man endures from them in the summer taiga. They beggar all description.

For three hours we marched without a stop, until we heard the noise of falling water. The sun was broiling. The horses breathed heavily, their heads lowered. The heat was so great that even the shade of the formidable cedars offered no respite from it. There was no sign of animals or birds; only insects darted about in the air, and the hotter the sun blazed down, the livelier they became.

I was inclined to call a halt, but the horses rejected the fodder and pressed close to the smoking fire. In such cases sitting is worse than keeping on the move, and we resaddled the animals and marched on.

The trail brought us to a hunting lodge, near which we pitched our camp.

The evening was still far away. I took my rifle and went to take a look at the environs. Having walked about a mile, I sat on a stump and listened.

A shrill and abrupt whistle sounded back of me, much like the metallic sound of the barber's scissors. I turned and saw a pika. My movements frightened the little rodent, which swiftly retreated into its hole. Then I saw a chipmunk. This striped ground squirrel, brisk and playful, scurried about nimbly amidst the dead-wood, climbed trees, descended, and again hid in the grass. Its fur was yellow for the most part, five black stripes running along its back and flanks.

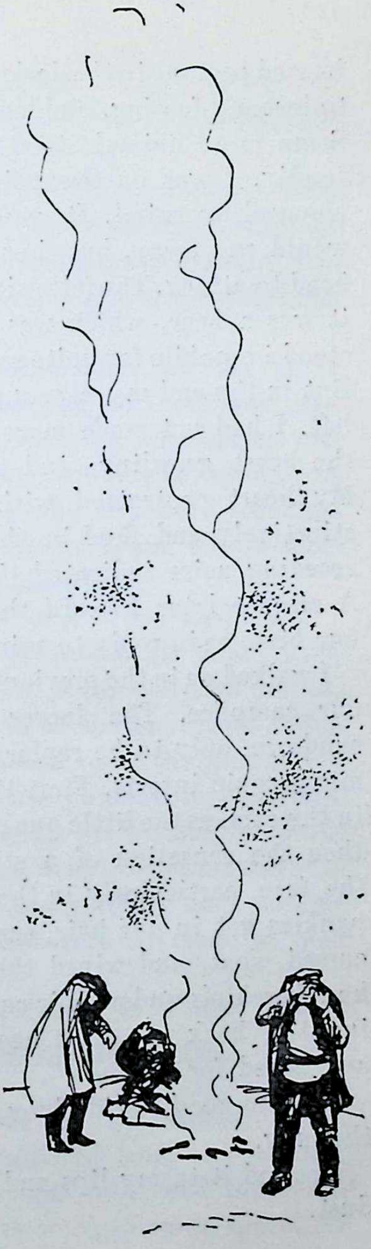
I noticed that the rodent kept returning to the same spot and each time departed with a load, its mouth full. Then it reappeared for more. That captured my attention. I edged nearer to watch its actions more closely. Dry mushrooms, roots and nuts lay deposited upon a fallen tree-trunk. It was as yet too early in the year for mushrooms or cedar-nuts, and I concluded that the chipmunk had brought up the preceding season's supply from its hole. This brought back to my mind Dersu's tale of the striped squirrel and its large hoards of provision, sometimes big enough to last it for two years. Lest its stocks should spoil, the little animal drags them out into the open from time to time and airs them, returning them to its hole at nightfall.

After some time I walked on. All along the way I came across freshly upturned dead-wood, and recognized the handiwork of the bear. That is his favourite pastime.

Roving about the taiga, he lifts the wind-fallen trees off the ground and gathers something under them. The Chinese say in jest that the bear tends the dead-wood, seeing to it that it is good and dry, turning first one and then the other side of it to the sun.

It so happened that I walked back along my old tracks. I recognized the huge cedar-tree under which I had stopped, crossed the brook by the same wind-fallen log, passed the same heap of boulders, and suddenly found myself at the place where the squirrel had been drying its food stores. There was now a deep pit in place of its hole. The nuts and mushrooms were scattered, and the freshly upturned earth bore the footprints of a bear. The beast had ravished the squirrel's nest, devoured its stores and, possibly, swallowed the rodent to boot.

In the meanwhile, evening approached. A beetle



buzzed past me in the darkness. I walked cautiously, afraid to lose my footing. Suddenly there was a surge of sounds. Some large animal stood some distance away, panting loudly. I was on the point of pulling the trigger, but changed my mind. It could be that the frightened beast would run away, but then it might also take it into its head to attack. The following minute seemed an age. I saw it was a bear, which was sniffing the air vigorously. I stood immobile for quite some time, not daring to budge. But in the end my nerves gave way and I moved to the left. I had not made more than two steps when I heard the beast growling, and the sound of snapping twigs. My heart contracted with terror. I raised my rifle instinctively and fired in the direction of the bear. The receding noise indicated that the animal was in flight. A minute later I heard the report of a rifle fired from our bivouac in reply to mine.

I walked on in the previous direction and soon glimpsed our campfire. The larger midges had vanished after sundown, only to be replaced by legions of tiny, almost microscopic insects. First there was a burning sensation in the ears, as the little punkies swarmed round our heads, then the sensation of a stinging spider's web covering the face, particularly in the region of the forehead. The punkies got in our hair, ears, nose and mouth. The men cursed, spat, and wiped their faces. The Cossacks fitted handkerchiefs under their caps in the vain hope of protecting the back of their heads and necks. I was thirsty and asked for tea.

"It's no good," said Epov, the Cossack who handed me the mug.

I raised it to my lips and saw its surface covered with dust.

"What is it?" I asked the Cossack.

"Punkies," he replied. "Scalded by the steam they fall into the boiling water."

First I tried blowing the punkies off, then fishing them out with my spoon, but every time I stopped to drink, new legions settled on the tea. The Cossack was right. I gave it up; splashed the tea out on the ground, and climbed under my mosquito-net.

After the meal the men settled down for the night. Some would not be bothered putting up their mosquito-nets and lay down in the open, covering themselves with their blankets. They kept tossing from side to side, groaning all the while and pulling the blankets over their heads, but it was all no use. One of them, his patience exhausted, jumped to his feet, shouting:

"Here, have all of me, all of me, d'you hear?"

He flung off his blanket and spread his arms wide. There was general merriment. It developed that he was not alone in his predicament. All of the men were suffering anguish, but none had wanted to be the first to rise and make a fire to smoke out the punkies. Several minutes later they were at it, ragging each other, groaning loudly, and cursing. Gradually a deep silence settled over the encampment. Myriads of mosquitoes and midges swarmed over my net. I fell asleep to the tune of their humming.

## 8. ACROSS THE SIKHOTA-ALIN

I was wakened in the morning by the voices of my men. It was five o'clock. I gathered from the snorting of the horses, the swishing of their tails, and the curses of the Cossacks that the midges were at work again. An astounding sight opened to my eyes as I dressed hurriedly and clambered out of the mosquito-net. Countless legions of midges hovered over our encampment. The wretched horses sought relief by sticking their noses into the fires.

A thick layer of midges covered the ashes of our campfire. The singed insects fell into the blaze in such multitudes that they put it out.

There were just two things we could do—make more fires and keep on the move. I ordered the men to saddle the horses and approached my rifle, which I had left leaning against a tree. It was unrecognizable, plastered with a thick grey film of punkies caught in the oil. Gathering up my trappings as quickly as possible, I walked away in advance of the main body.

The path forked out some distance from the lodge, one branch of it leading to the bank of the Ulaho, and the other left, to the Sikhota-alin mountain range.

We saw more and more river rapids. The path often crossed from one bank to the other, wind-fallen trees serving as natural bridges. This meant we were on a footpath. Towards nightfall we came to a hunting lodge. It was occupied by two Chinese—one young, and the other old. The first was a trapper, and the other a medicine hunter. The old man was lean and tall, and looked much like a mummy. His tanned wrinkled face and grey hair clearly showed that he would never again see seventy. They had on blue jackets, blue trousers, knee-pads and soft shoes. But the young man's clothes were new and fitted him well, while the other's were old and patched. They both wore hats, one a factory-made straw hat, the other a home-made birch-bark covering.

They were frightened on seeing us, but we told them who we were and their fear evaporated. They invited us to a meal of foxtail millet porridge and tea. We were at the foot of the Sikhota-alin, they told us, and said there was no road leading from here to the sea.

The old man behaved with dignity. He did not waste his words. The younger man, on the other hand, turned out to be talkative. He told us the two of them had a ginseng plantation in the taiga, and that they were on their way there. I was curious to see it and went with them. No doubt, I would have lost my way back if they had not put me right. We walked along mountain slopes for almost an hour, climbed a rock and descended into the valley. We came upon cascading mountain streams and deep ravines, their bottoms still covered with snow. At last we arrived at our goal. It was the densely wooded northern slope of the mountain.

The reader errs if he imagines a ginseng plantation to be a cultivated clearing sown to plants. It is a place where several ginseng roots had been found previously at different times, and other available roots are transplanted to it. The first thing I saw were awnings made of cedar roots to protect the ginseng from the burning rays of the sun. Ferns were planted round the ginseng and a trickle of water led to them along a narrow trench to cool the soil.

When the old man came to the plantation he dropped to his knees, folded his hands, laid them to his forehead, and bowed low twice. He was mumbling something under his breath—probably a prayer. Then he rose, lifted his folded hands to his head one more time, and got down to work. In the meanwhile, his young companion was hanging red rags inscribed with Chinese characters upon the branches of a tree.

So this was ginseng! There is no other plant in the world that has been the subject of so many tales and legends. Perhaps it was the influence of whatever I had read or of what the Chinese had told me, but I, too, was filled with awe at that moment for this unprepossessing specimen of the Araliaceae family. I stood on my knees to take a closer look at it. The old man thought I was praying, and at that instant I won his heart.

The two Chinese were busy clearing away dry twigs, transplanted and watered two bushes, and, noting that their trench fed too little water to the plantation, widened it with the desired result. Then they pulled out the weeds, but not all for some reason.

Towards evening I finally succeeded in persuading them to guide us across the Sikhota-alin to the source of the Wai-Futsing. The old man agreed to lead us there, but named two conditions: that we should not order him about or argue with him. There could be no question of the first, and as for the second, I accepted it readily.

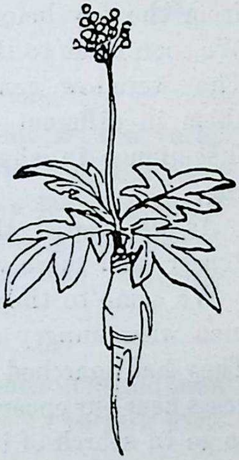
The punkies appeared at the first hint of dusk. The Chinese laid a smoke fire inside the fanza, while we sought relief in our mosquito-nets. Our minds set at rest by the knowledge that the Chinese would see us safely across the Sikhota-alin, we soon fell sound asleep. Only one thing worried us: the question of food supplies.

At eight next morning we were ready to set out. The old man walked at the head, followed by his young companion and two of my men with axes. The rest of the men and the pack-horses made up the rear. The old man carried a long stave. Not a word escaped his lips. He pointed out the direction in complete silence.

The coniferous forests in the Ussuri Territory are generally damp, mossy, ferny, overgrown with sedge grass, unlike similar forests in other regions, where the bare ground under the trees is covered with a thick layer of fallen needles.

That day we cut our food allowances by half, so our stores would last two days. If we failed to find habitations on the other side of the Sikhota-alin, we would face starvation. I was inclined to call a halt and procure food with our rifles, but our grey-haired guide insisted that we go on without delay. The conditions he made when he agreed to lead us were fresh in my mind and I bowed to his will. In all fairness to him, he led us splendidly.

The men's clothing had taken cruel punishment. Patches checkered shirts and trousers. The head-nets were torn, and of little or no use. Our faces were raw from the insect bites, an ugly rash covered our foreheads and the sides of our heads near the ears.



The food shortage prodded us on to greater effort. We cut our midday halt to thirty minutes, and marched on without stopping until dusk.

The long march was hard on the old man. No sooner had we halted than he dropped to the ground with a groan and was unable to rise unaided. There were still a few drops of rum in my flask, which I kept for an emergency such as this. After all, the old man had come with us at our insistent request, the next day he would have to march again, and then return. I poured the remainder of the rum into a mug and handed it to him. His eyes spoke of his gratitude as he remonstrated, refusing to drink alone and pointing at my companions. We all urged him to take it, and at last he did, climbed under his mosquito-net, and fell asleep. I followed his example.

The old man roused me when it was still dark.

"Must go," he said curtly.

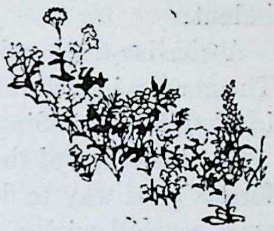
On swallowing a few spoonfuls of cold porridge left over from the day before, we set out. Our guide turned east. We soon came to the eroded foothills of the Sikhota-alin. They were low, gently sloping hills, brooks running down them in different directions, and it was hard to tell at first glance in what direction all the water was streaming.

As we neared the mountain range the forest became denser, and there was more fallen timber littering it.

We came to the watershed at the end of the day. The men were hungry and the horses badly needed a rest. They had marched all day without let-up. There was no grass near our encampment, but the animals were too spent to go in search of it, and lay down as soon as we unsaddled them. They were a far cry from the well-fed, strong horses they had been when leaving Shmakovka. The lack of food and the pernicious midges had got the better of them.

The Chinese shared their thin porridge of fern leaves and the remains of their foxtail millet with my men. After their meagre supper the men turned in. It was just as well that they did, because we set out next morning even earlier than the day before.

At five in the morning we began the ascent of the Sikhota-alin. It was slow and gradual. Our guide kept a straight course wherever possible, and only the steepest places were negotiated in zigzags.



Higher up the mountain, the streams were shallow and finally vanished altogether. But a hollow noise under the boulders indicated that the water sources were still rich. Little by little the noise subsided. We could hear water trickling, as though pouring from a tea-pot; then the trickling shrank to a dripping, and in the end we lost that too.

An hour later we came to the crest. The last few yards of our climb were particularly stiff. At the foot of a giant Siberian cedar on the summit we found a small shrine constructed from tree bark. Our guide bowed before it. And as he straightened, he said, pointing east:

"The Wai-Futsing!"

That meant we had come to the watershed. The old man squatted on the ground and motioned to us to join him. It was time for a rest.

We made a fire, had tea, and went on.

The descent to the Wai-Futsing was steep. A deep gorge lay in our way, littered with stones and dead-wood. The cascading water had washed out numerous holes and pits, hidden treacherously under a thick growth of bracken. They were veritable man-traps. One of the men dislodged a boulder. In falling it dislodged other boulders and caused a landslide.

It is a grim business descending such ravines, particularly for the horses. A brook ran along the bottom of the depression, entirely hidden by the shrubbery. The water surged down the valley babbling merrily, as though exultant at having broken out into the open from under the surface. The lower reaches of the brook were less turbulent.

A similar deep gully crossed our path from the right. The gorge widened into a narrow valley, known among the local Chinese as Sing-Kwandahow.

On this slope of the Sikhota-alin coniferous and mixed forests gave way to deciduous timberland. The meadows were covered with a carpet of flowers—irises of all hues, from pale blue to deep purple, a variety of orchids, buttercups, blue-red bellflowers, lilies of the valley, violets, strawberry blossoms, bright carnations, and red, orange and yellow lilies. This transition from dense coniferous woodland to thin oak groves and flowered meadows was so abrupt that it drew involuntary exclamations of surprise from our company. What we had seen three or four days west of the Sikhota-alin, was reproduced here at its very foot. Besides, I noted another striking feature: the flowers that were already faded in the west had not even begun to blossom here.

There were swarms of midges and few lepidoptera in the Li-Futsing basin. But there were brick-red painted beauties with their rainbow hues, the white-and-yellow Parnassians with black and red spots, and large, deep blue swallow-tailed butterflies. The latter often perched on the water and abandoned themselves, wings outspread, to the current. The impression was that they were caught in the water by accident and could not fly. Several times I bent down to lift them out of the water, and each time they took wing and, flying some distance away, again settled upon the river surface. Bees and wasps buzzed tirelessly among the flowers, and shaggy black-, orange-, and white-bellied bumble-bees darted whirring in all directions. In the grass busybody ground beetles ran about, living up to their predacious reputation of veritable tigers among insects. Dragon-flies with their transparent wings and limpid blue eyes darted to and fro over the water and in the damper places.

Judging by the numerous tracks, the class of mammals was here represented by the roe, deer, wild boar, bear and tiger.

Our progress was fairly rapid in spite of fatigue and short rations. The well-chosen route across the Sikhota-alin, the abrupt transition from the desolate taiga to animated woodland, and, last but not least, the splendid path we came upon, had a heartening effect on all of us. At twilight we arrived at an empty hunting lodge and called a halt.

On the next day, which was June 17, we parted with our guide. I gave him my hunting knife and a leather bag. We no longer needed our axes. The path led along the river-bank, and the farther we went, the better it became. The forest opened suddenly upon a breath-taking mountainscape. To the west there was a magnificent view of the Sikhota-alin. I expected to see a piling accumulation of mountains and pointed exotic peaks, but the summit was flat and regular, dome-shaped peaks merging gradually into wide saddle-shaped declivities. Time and water had indeed done a thorough job.

At about ten we spotted wheel-marks on the path, which could never have been more welcome. The horses were at the end of their tether, staggering along under their packs.

As we came to the river we glimpsed a fanza on the opposite bank in the shade of giant elms. We could scarcely have been happier to see it if it had been a first-class hotel. When the hospitable Chinese learnt that we had had nothing to eat for the last two days they hurriedly cooked a dinner. Their flat cakes fried in bean oil, and the millet porridge with pickled vegetables, tasted better than the most delicious of city dishes. We decided by tacit agreement to stay with the Chinese overnight. Our hosts made room for us on their k'angs, which were excessively warm. But we preferred the heat to the punkies outside.

It was crowded and stuffy in the fanza, and the windows were curtained with blankets. I dressed and stepped out into the open.

The night was calm and warm, the kind of night insects like best. But what I saw was so astounding that I forgot about the midges and stared in utter amazement.

The air about me was filled with bluish sparks. It was the fire-flies. They produced a winking light which each time lasted no longer than a split second. By fixing my eyes on one such light, I watched the flight of the beetle. The insects usually fly singly, but that night their number was legion. It is said settlers from Russia fired their guns at the winking lights when they saw them first, and fled in terror. The beetles darted about in the grass, close to the earth, and in the shrubbery, and up among the branches of the trees. They winked and the stars winked back at them. It was a pageant of lights.

A bright lightning cleaved the sky suddenly, illuminating the entire landscape, and a huge long-tailed meteor flashed across the heavens. In an instant the bolide disintegrated into a thousand sparks and dropped somewhere beyond the hills. The luminous insects vanished as if by magic. Some two or three minutes passed before a solitary light winked again in the bushes, followed by another, and more and more, until some thirty seconds later the air was again filled with darting sparks.

But much as I was fascinated by the beauties of the night and the striking sight of fire-flies and the falling fire-ball, I had to seek shelter from the punkies which swarmed over my neck, arms, face and hair. I went back into the hut and lay down. Sleep overpowered me.

The next day was a rest day. Both men and horses were in sore need of it. They were all exhausted and needed more than a single night's sleep to get back their strength.

The following morning we parted with our Chinese hosts and went on. There was a highway of sorts from here, and to give our animals a rest, I hired two carts for the packs.

The Wai-Futsing valley is dotted with Chinese fanzas. In summer their inhabitants engage in farming and fishery, and in winter they hunt.

The Arzamasovka River, a major tributary of the Wai-Futsing, falls into the latter from the left. Somewhat above that point, on an elevation, stands the small Russian settlement of Futsing (now renamed Vetkino). In 1906 the village consisted of a mere four families. They were the first settlers to come to that region from Russia. The settlement had a distinctive appearance. Its old neat little houses appeared cosy, and their inmates were cheerful and good-humoured. They greeted us cordially and offered us lodgings.

The village veterans came together in the evening to tell us about the hardships they encountered in this alien land during the first few years of their stay. They were brought here in 1859, landed in Olga Bay, and left to shift for themselves. They had settled about a mile away from the bay, forming a small settlement, Novinka. But they soon discovered that it was less foggy farther inland, and moved to the Wai-Futsing valley. In 1906 the population of Novinka consisted of a solitary settler. The spots where the peasant houses had previously stood are to be seen to this day.

But in their new settlement they also encountered trouble. They had not known better and had sowed their crops down in the valley, and their harvest was washed away by the very first flood. The second flood washed away all their hay. Tigers made short work of their cattle and began attacking the people. The peasants had just one gun, and that only a percussion musket. To drive hunger away from their doors they hired themselves out to Chinese farmers as day-labourers for a daily wage of a pound of foxtail millet. Accounts were squared monthly, and the men had to carry their millet home over a distance of 45 miles. The old men accustomed themselves to their new homes with the greatest difficulty. They nurtured memories of their native parts, while the younger people soon struck firm root. They developed into splendid riflemen and excellent hunters. The swift current of the local rivers held no fear for them, and they soon ventured into the open sea.

In European Russia hunting bears single-handed is regarded as a special feat of daring. Here each youth hunted bears on his own. Nekrasov, the great Russian poet, dedicated a song to a peasant who killed forty bears, while here the brothers Pyatishkins and Myakishevs had each killed more than seventy. Then came the Silins and Vorovs, who had several tigers to their credit and had lost count of the bears. On one occasion they tried to bind a living bear for fun's sake, and almost paid for it with their lives. The hunters bore marks of tigers' teeth and boar fangs; each had repeatedly looked death in the face, and only lucky accidents had saved them from disaster every time.

A man of about forty-five entered the hut in the middle of the stories. Of medium height, lean, long-haired and bearded, he bowed to us, smiled apologetically, and seated himself on a box in the corner of the room.

"Who is he?" asked one of us.

"'Tigers' Death,'" several voices replied in unison.

We showered him with questions, but he was not a talkative man. After a bit, "Tigers' Death" Kashlev rose to his feet.

"It's no trick killing a beast. Nothing to it. The trick is to spot it," he said, pulling on his cap, and left.

We learned a few things about Kashlev from the other peasants. He had earned his nickname for killing more tigers than anyone else in these parts. He was better than anyone else at tracking them down. He roved in the taiga alone, slept in the open, often without even a fire. No one ever knew where he went, and when he would return. He was a man of the taiga through and through. He had found a cliff on the Sandaho frequented by tigers, and that was where he ambushed them.

There were men among the peasants who brought back living tigers. They never made use of cages or traps, and caught them with their bare hands, binding them with ropes. On spotting the tracks of a tigress with yearling cubs, they let loose their dogs and fired their rifles into the air, yelling at the top of their voices. All this racket frightened the tigers, who scattered in different directions. The hunters then stalked them one by one. Expeditions of that kind require pluck, agility and determination.

The story-tellers rambled on and on. It was all so fascinating that we were prepared to listen to them through the night. But at midnight the peasants began to disperse for home.

After a good rest we set out again, eager to reach the seashore. We came to the rock known among local inhabitants as "Devil's Cliff." The sea was a mere fifteen minutes' walk from it. The reader will surely appreciate our emotions on seeing it. We sat on the boulders and gazed with joy upon the waves breaking against the shore.

The first leg of our journey was over.

We came to Post Olga at two o'clock on June 21. Our equipment was to arrive there by ship. While waiting for it, I decided to explore the vicinity.

We fixed upon an excursion along the Arzamasovka. I set out early in the morning of July 15, taking along three Cossacks—Murzin, Epov and Kozhevnikov. We spent the night in the village of Permskoye, and continued our trip on the next day.

On reaching the source of the Arzamasovka we ascended the watershed and followed the mountains for some time in a south-westerly direction.

A well-beaten earthen path, devoid of all vegetation, brought us to the Sikhota-alin. It forked, one of its branches leading into the mountains, and the other running down along the right bank of the Listvenichnaya River. We pitched our camp at the forking, after which two of us went hunting, and the other two remained at the bivouac.

In the summer hunting is only possible at dawn and at dusk. In the day-time the beasts make themselves scarce somewhere in the thickets, and it is hard to spot them. That left time on our hands, and we lay in the grass and slept.

When I opened my eyes the sun had vanished. Clouds billowed in the sky and the day seemed to be on the wane.

It was four in the afternoon—the right time to start on our hunt. I roused my companions, they pulled on their boots and boiled tea.

After tea Murzin and I took our guns and went off in different directions. My dog came with me on a leash.

Soon I got on the trail of wild boars. The pigs were on the move, digging up the earth as they went along. Judging by the number of tracks, there were probably more than twenty of them. On one occasion, as I noted, they scattered. Then they came together again. I was on the point of increasing my pace, but my attention was suddenly arrested by an imprint near a muddy puddle—it was a fresh imprint of a tiger's paw. A vivid picture arose in my mind's eye of the boars moving and the tiger stalking them. Then came the thought of turning back, but I took myself in hand and advanced cautiously.

The wild boars were going uphill, then descended an adjacent gully, began another oblique ascent, but turned aside before reaching the summit and again dropped into the valley. In my hot pursuit I forgot to memorize the locality. All my attention was absorbed by the wild boars and the tiger tracks. The chase lasted about an hour.

A few drops from above made me stop. It had begun to drizzle. At first it was only a slight drizzle, which soon stopped. Some ten minutes later it drizzled again, and then again and again at shorter intervals, the rain increasing in intensity, and finally turning into a downpour.

"Time to return," I thought and looked about. There was nothing but forest all around. Then I ascended one of the near-by hills to take my bearings.

The sky was covered with clouds as far as the eye could see, and only the evening glow shimmered along the edge of the western horizon. The clouds were moving west, and there was no reason to hope that the weather would change. The mountains appeared unfamiliar. Which way to go? I realized my mistake. I had been much too absorbed in the boar chase and had paid little attention to the surroundings. To follow my own trail back was impracticable. Night would descend before I would be half way to the camp. Then I remembered that, a non-smoker, I had no matches with me. Expecting to return before nightfall, I had not taken any along. That had been my second mistake. I fired into the air twice, but received no reply. Then I decided to descend into the valley and follow the river as far as possible with the faint hope of coming to the path before dark; I began my descent without delay, and Leshy followed submissively.

In a forest even the slightest drizzle drenches one to the skin. Each bush and tree gather the rain-water in their foliage and spill it upon the traveller in large drops. My clothes were soon quite wet.

Darkness fell in the forest within half an hour. I could no longer distinguish a hole from a stone, and fallen timber from level ground. I stumbled frequently. The rain intensified. It came thick and fast. After walking another mile I stopped for a rest. The dog was also drenched. It shook itself vigorously and whined softly. I unleashed it; that was what Leshy had been waiting for. It shook itself again and ran off into the dark. A feeling of utter solitude gripped me, and I began calling to my dog, but in vain. In another two minutes I resumed my journey in the direction taken by the animal.

When walking through the taiga in daylight the traveller goes round the fallen timber, the bushes and undergrowth. In the darkness he stumbles into the thick of them. Twigs catch at his clothes, vines tear off his headgear, scratch his face, and twine themselves round his legs.

It is a ghastly thing to be in the forest alone in bad weather, amidst wild beasts, without a fire. The sense of my utter helplessness made me advance with great caution and listen to every sound. My nerves were on edge. The swish of a falling branch and the rustling of an itinerant mouse sounded thunderously loud to my ears and made me start and turn sharply. Several times I was on the point of firing.

It became pitch dark. I was drenched to the skin. Water poured in streams down my neck. In feeling my way I had stumbled into a pile of dead-wood. Even in broad daylight it would have required considerable effort to get out of it. Feeling the fallen timber, the stumps, stones and branches with my hands, I succeeded finally in scrambling out of the maze.

I was totally played out and sat down, but instantly felt terribly cold. My teeth were chattering. I shook as in a fever. I was footsore, but the cold made me move on.

Climb a tree! That silly notion always comes first to the mind of the lost wayfarer. I drove it away. It was even colder up there, the legs would grow numb from the cramped position. Cover myself with fallen leaves? But that would not shelter me from the rain, and, besides, I would be certain to catch a cold on the damp soil. It was so stupid of me to have left behind the matches. I resolved never again to leave the bivouac without them.

Then I clambered over fallen trees and staggered down a slope. Suddenly I was startled by the noise of snapping twigs and heavy panting on my right. I was going to fire, but the barrel of my gun got entangled in the lianas. I yelled in terror and in that instant felt something licking my face. It was Leshy.

Two emotions mingled in my chest—that of anger at the dog for frightening me, and of joy that it had returned.

Leshy lingered at my feet for a few minutes, whimpered softly, and again vanished into the darkness.

I moved with untold difficulty. Every step was an enormous effort. In some twenty minutes I came to a precipice. Somewhere far below water rumbled. I felt for a stone and pushed it, hearing it drop into the water somewhere deep down. Then I turned sharply to the right, by-passing the dangerous spot. At that instant Leshy returned again. I was not frightened this time and caught him by the tail. He took my hand between his teeth carefully and whined softly, as though imploring me to let go. I did. The dog ran off, and then came back. It composed itself only after it was sure that I was following in its trail. We walked thus for another half an hour.

On one occasion I slipped and fell, knocking my knee painfully against a stone. A minute later Leshy returned and squatted at my side. I could not see it in the dark, but felt its warm breath. When the pain in my knee subsided a bit I rose and went on in the direction where I could see the sky between the trees.

After some ten steps I slipped again, and then several times more. I felt the earth with my fingers and discovered to my great joy that I had come to a path. In spite of the fatigue and the pain in my leg, I went forward briskly.

"Nothing to worry about now," I thought to myself. "The path will bring me somewhere."

I decided to keep on the move all night until daybreak, but that was easier said than done. I could not see the footpath in the inky darkness, and only felt it under my feet. My progress was therefore extremely slow. Every time I lost the trail I dropped to my knees and felt about for it with my fingers. It was particularly difficult at the turns. Sometimes I stopped and waited for Leshy's return, and the dog brought me back to the path. In an hour and a half I came to the bank of a stream. The water rushed noisily over the stones. I dipped my hand in to learn the direction of the current.

On fording the brook I came to another path I should never have found if it had not been for Leshy. The dog sat in the middle of it and waited for me. When it saw me coming, it jumped round me for a bit and then ran off ahead again. The darkness blotted out everything, and only the noise of the stream, the swashing of the rain and the wind in the trees reached my ears. I came to another path, and now it was a question of whether to go right or left along it. I decided to wait for the dog, but it would not come for a long time and I went to my right. Leshy came running towards me some five minutes later. I bent down to stroke it, and it shook itself at that moment, spraying me with water. But I did not scold it, stroked its wet back, and walked in its trail.

My progress was much easier now. The path no longer twisted and turned and there was scarcely any fallen timber. I had to ford another rivulet, slipped and fell into the water. But the dipping could not make my clothes wetter than they were.

Finally I had to give in and rest on a stump. My arms and legs ached from all the knocks and splinters, my head was heavy, and my eyelids closed. I dozed off. Then it reached my consciousness that I saw a fire away among the trees, and I made an effort to open my eyes. It was dark. The searing cold bit into me. Afraid of falling ill, I began jumping up and down, and again glimpsed the light; a mirage, I thought, but the light reappeared and my drowsiness evaporated. Abandoning the path I headed straight for the fire.

In some fifteen minutes I was near enough to see it plainly. I saw it was not our bivouac. What struck me was the absence of people. They could not have left the encampment at night in this driving rain. They had apparently taken cover behind the trees. I was terrified. Should I go to the fire, or not? It was all right if the fire belonged to hunters, but if it was a bandit bivouac, what then? Suddenly Leshy jumped out of a thicket behind me and ran up to the fire. Then it stopped, looking about, surprised by the absence of living beings. It walked round the fire, sniffing the earth, and wagged its tail. That could only mean that the fire was made by one of my men; otherwise the dog would have shown signs of anger and unrest. That decided me. I came out of my hiding place. But the other party did it before me. It was Murzin. He had also lost his way and made the fire to while away the hours before dawn. On hearing my footsteps he hid behind a tree. The caution with which I approached had made him wary.

We dried our clothes. Steam rose in billows from our wet things. The wind, we saw by the smoke of our fire, was changing—a sure sign that the rain would soon cease. Indeed, it subsided within half an hour. Only the trees still shed large drops of rain-water.

It was somewhat drier under the large fir-tree at whose foot my companion had made the fire. We undressed and dried our underwear. Then we cut some fir twigs to lie on, and fell asleep, leaning our backs against the tree-trunk.

The morning was chilly. I found on waking up that the fire had gone out. The sky was still grey and in places a fog hung over the mountains. I roused the Cossack and we went to look for our encampment. The path upon which we spent the night led off at an angle and we had to leave it. On the other side of the river we found another path, which brought us to our bivouac.

## 9. BY THE SEA

The long-awaited supplies from Vladivostok, when at last they arrived, were more than welcome. We had scoured and rescoured the vicinity of Olga Bay and were aching to go on. The horses' gear and our own were in perfect order, the food stores were replenished.

In the afternoon of July 28 we set out along the coast, heading for Vladimir Bay.

On the way we came to several mountain caves, of which the Mokrushinsk cave—not as yet properly explored—was the largest and most interesting. Its entrance was triangular, and some 150 feet up the mountain-side.

It opened upon a large hall about 120 feet long and 100 feet high. A deep well at its extreme end was a hazard to foolhardy explorers, but we turned left a short distance from the well into a niche which led into a long humpbacked passage. At the top of its hump the passage ran between two stalagmite columns. It was narrow and low at that point and we had to negotiate it on all fours. The passage was about 160 feet long and opened into a wide corridor, which brought us to a second, snow-white hall. This second hall was not as large as the first, but far more striking for its beauty. From it a narrow corridor led to another hall of breath-taking grandeur, being much larger than the first two put together. Stalactites and stalagmites formed a magnificent colonnade, and the walls were everywhere incrusted with limestone designs suggestive of frozen waterfalls. Here and there in troughs and craters water had accumulated, which was so pure and transparent that it was virtually invisible. Then came another deep well, and side passages leading to a big cave where each loudly-spoken word produced ringing echoes. A stone dropped into the well raised a tumult reminiscent of an artillery bombardment and we had the impression for a fearful minute that a landslide had begun and the vaults were caving in about us.

Before evening our party came to the mouth of the Vladimirovka and encamped on the sea-shore.

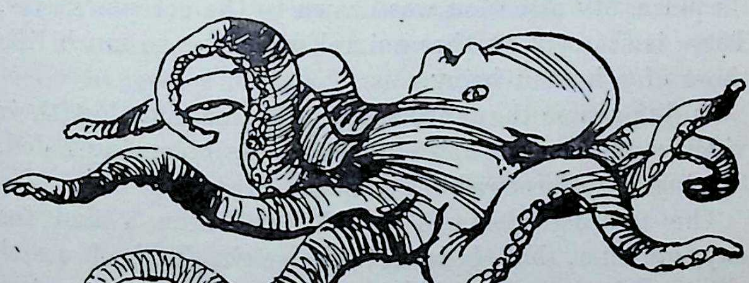
The next day was devoted to an investigation of Vladimir Bay, which the Chinese call Huluwai (from "hulu," which is the Chinese for a round pumpkin, and "wai," meaning bay).

On the shore we discovered a number of small Chinese fanzas, and the little mounds of waste by their sides told us about the occupations of their inmates. Next to one of the fanzas, for instance, we found heaps of stripped sea-shell valves, some of them already overgrown with grass. The Chinese, we learned, take only the muscles of the mollusk, dry and ship them to Chinese towns, where they are highly prized as a delicacy.

Mounds of withered crabs' carapaces lay near another fanza, baked red by the sun. The meat from the limbs and pincers of the crustaceans was laid out to dry alongside on straw mats.

The next fanza belonged to sea lettuce traders. It was flanked by grass sheds, where the lettuce was hung out for seasoning. A great many Chinese were busy about it, some dragging the weeds from sea-bottom with special crotches, others keeping watch that they got the right measure of sun, lest they withered and lost their natural greenish-brown colour, and others still tying the lettuce in bunches and arranging the latter in the sheds.

I glimpsed several Chinese on the opposite shore of the bay, wading about in shallow, knee-deep water with poles in their hands. They were so engrossed in whatever they were doing that they did not see us until we drew level with them. Naked down to their waists, trousers rolled up to their knees, they moved about cautiously in the water, gazing intently at the sea-bottom. Occasionally they stopped, plunged their poles into the water, and flung something on to the shore. They were gathering edible mussels. The ends of their poles were equipped with small scoop-shaped nets and iron hooks. They used the hooks to tear the shells away from the stones, and then scooped them out of the water with the nets. Several Chinese on the shore dropped the shells into a cauldron of boiling water. In dying the mollusks opened the valves of their shells, and the contents were at once removed with knives and put back into the cauldron, where they were processed for long keeping by drawn-out boiling.



The shell-hunters were scattered all along the shore line in ones and twos. I sat on a stone and gazed out to sea. Suddenly I heard shouts to my left and, turning, saw something of a struggle in the water. The Chinese were trying to fling some animal on to the shore with their poles, advancing upon it cautiously, evidently intent on catching it, and yet visibly afraid. I ran in their direction. It was a giant octopus. The monster twined its powerful tentacles round stones, waved them in the air, and made sudden lunges for the open sea in the hope of breaking the ring of its assailants. More Chinese came running to aid their colleagues.

The huge octopus was near the shore, and I saw it clearly. I can hardly say what colour it was. It kept changing colours all the time from bluish to red, bright green, grey and even yellow. The nearer the Chinese drove it to the shallow shore line, the more helpless it became, until finally they pulled it ashore. It looked much like a large sack with long arms extending from its head, which were provided with a multitude of suckers. Whenever it raised two or three arms at a time I saw its huge black beak. At times the beak projected strongly from its head, and at others it was drawn in so that an opening remained in its place. My attention was drawn to the octopus's eyes. There is scarcely another animal with eyes so much like those of a human being.

In due course the movements of the octopus lost their vigour; quivers ran down its body, its colouring faded, turning a uniform reddish brown.

The striking specimen would have been a find for any museum, but I lacked the right kind of vessel to store it in, and sufficient formalin. So I rested content with just a piece of its arm, stowing it away in a jar with some formalined carapaces of hermit crabs.

When in the evening I examined the contents of the jar I was surprised to find two of the shells missing. It turned out that they had been sucked in by the octopus's arm.

Our inspection of the various sea trades plied by the Chinese, and the octopus hunt, had taken up almost all the day.

After nightfall the Chinese treated me to an octopus dinner. They boiled the monster's meat in sea water; it was white and resilient, and its taste suggestive of cepes.

## 10. A HAPPY ENCOUNTER

At sunrise we were well on our way.

The footpath connecting Vladimir Bay with the Tadushu valley was wide enough to accommodate our pack-horses. It led across mountains through a luxuriant forest of oaks, birches, lime-trees and black poplars, running along the left bank of the Tadushu and veering off along a mountain ledge near the former river-mouth.

In the afternoon the weather deteriorated. Clouds raced low overhead, skimming the mountain-tops. The landscape changed. The valley below us took on a frowning look, the cliffs—magnificent in the sunshine—looked sullen, and the water in the river turned several shades darker. I knew what this meant and ordered the men to pitch camp and stock up a night's supply of fire-wood.

Two of the men wanted to go hunting. I warned them against straying too far from camp, and advised them to return in good time. Within the hour one of them returned and reported that they had met up with a lone hunter some two miles away at the foot of a rocky height. The man had asked them who we were, how long we had been on the march, and wanted to know our destination. On hearing my name the stranger showed signs of excitement.

The news agitated me. I wondered who it could be. My man said there was no need for me to go and meet the stranger, since he had himself promised to come to our bivouac. But I took my rifle, whistled for the dog, and pushed off along the footpath.

The evening dusk was black after the glare of the campfire, but gradually my eyes grew accustomed to it and I could readily distinguish the path. The moon was new. Heavy clouds sped across the sky, shrouding the moon from sight, and it seemed to race headlong to meet them and to cut through them. A hush lay over all living things; only the grasshoppers chirred softly in the grass.

I could no longer see the lights of our fire. Suddenly my dog ran forward, barking furiously, and as I raised my head I saw a dim figure.

"Who goes there?" I shouted, and the voice I heard in reply sent a thrill of joy down my spine.

"Dersu! Dersu!" I exclaimed jubilantly, hurrying towards him.

We hugged each other in a close embrace, as though we were wrestling, and my dog Alpa hurled itself upon Dersu at first, but its angry growl was succeeded by a welcoming whine as it recognized him.

"Hallo, captain!" the Gold said, fingering his collar.

I showered him with questions, eager to know where he was coming from, what he had been doing all that time, how he got to the valley and where he was going. He could scarcely keep up with all my inquiries, and it was only after some time that we calmed down and regained the faculty of coherent speech.

"I came to the Tadushu," he was saying, "and folks told me four captains and twelve Cossacks were staying in Shi-min (the Olga Post). Must go there, I thought."

After a brief chat we turned back, heading for our bivouac. I was in high spirits. And no wonder: Dersu was with me again.

We soon came to our camp. The men made way for us, examining the Gold with undisguised curiosity.

Dersu had not changed at all. He was dressed as before in a leather jacket and deerskin trousers, wore the same band round his head and had the same old Berdan rifle. Only the musket-rest seemed a bit newer.

The men saw that Dersu and I were old friends. He hung his rifle on the branch of a tree and, in his turn, looked me over from head to foot. I could see by the expression in his eyes and by his smile that he was glad to see me.

I had the men make tea, and myself set about asking Dersu what he had been doing in the intervening three years. On parting with me near Lake Hanka he had trapped sable all winter, hunted for antlers in the spring, and in the summer went off to Futsing. Word of our expedition had sent him hurrying to the Tadushu.

The men turned in early, while Dersu and I talked deep into the night. All fears of bandits, wild beasts, snow and flood left me with Dersu's arrival.

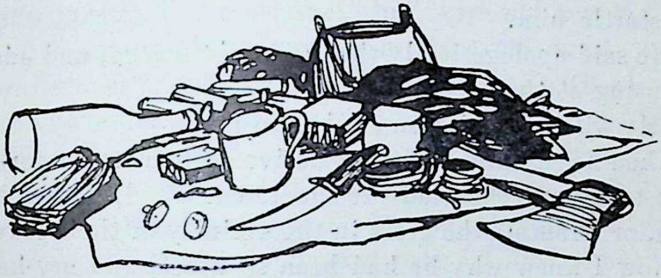
Though the rain had stopped when I woke up at nine, the sky looked sullen, and the weather by no means favourable. Marching in this weather would be trying, but it would be more trying still to sit idle. The men welcomed my order to saddle the horses, and within thirty minutes we were on our way. Dersu and I had come to a tacit agreement—he would come with us. It could not have been otherwise, and along the way we visited the rocky height where my men had found him to get his things which, as before, amounted to no more than a single kitbag.

I had a bottle of rum for medical purposes, from which I dispensed a few drops in bad weather. Only a finger of it was left, and I decided to rid myself of an extra burden by emptying the bottle into the tea. Then I threw the empty bottle into the grass.

Remonstrating heatedly, Dersu dashed after it. For a city dweller like me the vessel was indeed valueless, but not so for a forest dweller. Dersu loosened the strings of his kitbag, and as he emptied it my astonishment increased. There was an empty flour sack, two worn shirts, a bundle of thin leather straps, rope, old native footwear, cartrige-cases, a powder-box, lead, a box of percussion caps, tenting, a goatskin, a hunk of brick-tea and tobacco leaves, an empty tin, an awl, a small axe, matches, flint and steel, tinder, tarry kindling, birch bark, an empty box, a mug, a small pot, a curved native knife, catgut, two needles, an empty spool, dried herbs, boar's bile, bear's teeth and claws, musk-deer hoofs and a lynx's talons strung on a string, two copper buttons, and a multitude of other rubbish. Among all this I recognized things that I had thrown away and which he, it seemed, had dutifully picked up and carried about with him.

After sorting out his treasures I advised discarding a good half of them. But Dersu implored me to touch nothing, insisting that his hoard might come in handy at some future date. I did not press the point and decided henceforth to throw nothing away before consulting the Gold, while he, afraid that I might change my mind, hurriedly stowed his treasures back into the kitbag, in which process the empty bottle received his special attention.

In the evening clouds again gathered in the sky, and I feared a rain. But Dersu reassured me. He said I had mistaken fog for clouds, and that the next day would be a fine one, even hot. Knowing his forecasts to be infallible, I asked him for the signs from which he had drawn his conclusion.



"Air not heavy," the Gold replied, taking a deep breath and pointing to his chest.

A child of nature, he sensed the weather's moods with all his being, as though furnished with a sixth sense.

We made our camp on the bank of the river, in a thin oak grove. The Cossacks who reconnoitred the vicinity reported numerous animal tracks and asked to go hunting. In the day-time taiga dwellers lie low in the thickets, leaving their hide-outs shortly before dusk. They hover on the edge of the forest and come out to graze in the meadows only after the black of night envelops the earth.

But the Cossacks did not want to wait. They unsaddled the horses, and departed. Only Dersu and I remained by the fire.

He was moody all day, squatting and brooding in odd corners of the camp. He shook his head negatively to all my anxious questions, fingered his axe and sought apparently to drive away some disturbing thoughts.

More than two hours passed. The long shadows indicated that the sun had sunk to the horizon. It was time for us to join the hunt. I called to Dersu, and seemed to startle him.

He said apologetically that he would not go, and added pointing at the forest:

"My wife and children are buried here."

Then he explained that by native custom it was forbidden to disturb the dead—to shoot, cut wood, gather berries, or trample the grass in the vicinity of their graves.

Now I knew why he had been so upset, and my heart went out to him. I told him I would not go either and would stay with him at the bivouac.

As it grew dark I heard three rifle reports, and was glad that they did not come from the direction of the graves.

The Cossacks returned after dark. They had bagged a doe. We had our evening meal and turned in. Twice during the night I woke up to see Dersu sitting desolately by the fire.

In the morning Dersu was gone. He had left behind his kitbag and rifle, which meant that he would come back. While waiting for him I strolled up and down the meadows, and quite unconsciously approached the river-bank. The Gold was there, sitting motionlessly on the bare earth near a large stone. I hailed him, and as he turned his head I saw the signs of a sleepless night in his face.

"Let's go, Dersu," I said.

"I live here before," he mumbled in reply. "Father and mother live here too. Our yurt and barn burnt down."

He cut himself short, rose to his feet and walked in silence towards our encampment. We found the Cossacks ready to resume the march. They were waiting for us.

Soon after midday we came to a fanza. An elderly native volunteered to guide us a bit of the way. He walked beside Dersu and they conversed in undertones. Subsequently I learned that they were old acquaintances. In parting Dersu gave him the rum bottle I had thrown away, and the native's face lit up with pleasure at so generous a present.

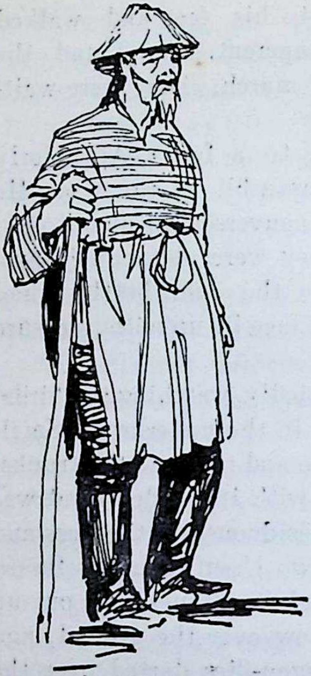
We walked with Dersu unhurriedly, watching the birds. Solitary buntings darted about in the underbrush. Small Ussuri woodpeckers perched here and there on the trunks. Of these the green woodpecker with its golden head was particularly engaging, pecking assiduously at the trees and unalarmed by our approach. Two Ussuri magpies fussed about in the foliage near by, and at one point we put up a hawk. It took wing, flying low over the ground, and vanished among the trees. Dragon-flies darted over the water, one of them hotly pursued by a wagtail, which strove to catch it in flight. But the dragon-fly led it a merry chase.

Our attention was arrested by the alarmed cheep of a cedar-bird. Dersu motioned to me to stop.

"Wait," he said. "It's coming this way."

Indeed, the cheep sounded nearer and nearer. The fussy and timorous bird was doubtlessly following someone through the forest. Some five minutes later a man stepped out of the thickets, freezing to the spot when he saw us. Dersu told him he had nothing to fear.

He was clearly a ginseng hunter. His shirt and trousers were of a blue cotton fabric, his shoes of soft leather, and



his headgear of birch bark. An oil-paper apron protected his front from the dew and a badger skin was tucked under his girdle at the back so he could sit on damp dead-wood without fear of getting wet. A knife, a bone scoop for digging ginseng roots, and a little pouch with flint and steel hung at his belt. In his hands the Chinese held a long stick with which he burrowed about in the leaves and grass at his feet.

The man was about fifty-five and grey-haired. The sun had tanned his face and hands to a deep yellow red. He was unarmed.

Seeing that we meant no harm, he seated himself on a fallen tree, pulled out a rag from under his shirt and wiped his perspiring face; his posture spoke of extreme exhaustion.

He told us he had a fanza in the upper reaches of the river and that in his search for ginseng he often strayed far afield, staying away from home for weeks on end. Before resuming his journey after a short rest, he told us how to find his home and invited us to stop there. I followed him with my eyes. Some distance away from us he bent to the ground, picked up some moss and laid it on a tree.

At dusk we found his little hut, its peaked roof rising directly from the ground and reminiscent of a native yurt. The two windows on each side of the door were papered.

In places the paper was torn and patched. Inside the hut there was no trace of trapper's or hunter's tools—only rakes, spades, birch-bark boxes of various dimensions, and scoops for ginseng digging.

We came to a stretch of thick woodland and called a brief halt. After our meal Dersu and I went on ahead and the caravan followed in our wake. Our way led uphill. I thought the path was rounding some perilous point where the river flowed through a narrow gorge, but it turned out that we had gone off our course and taken the wrong trail. Firstly, it bore no trace of hoofprints, and secondly, it led upstream—a fact which I noticed on glancing at the water in the rivulet. We had no choice but to turn back and make straight for the river in the hope of crossing our old path at some point along the way.

We had strayed far off our course, it developed, and were obliged to cross to the left bank and skirt the foot of a mountain.

Oaks, cedars, black birches, maples, aralias, spruces, poplars, hornbeams, firs, larches and yews grew in spectacular confusion. The semi-darkness under the trees lent the forest an uncanny air. Dersu walked slowly, gazing intently under his feet as usual. Suddenly he stopped and, eyes glued to something on the ground, let slip his kitbag, laid his rifle down, flung away his axe, and stretched himself flat upon the earth, mumbling fervent entreaties.

"What's come over you?" I asked.

He raised himself and replied curtly, pointing at the grass:

"Ginseng!"

I looked at the thick green carpet, but could not spot the herb until Dersu pointed it out to me. It was a small four-leafed grass-like plant about 15 inches high. Each leaf consisted of five leaflets, of which the middle one was the longest, the two at its sides a bit shorter, and the extreme ones the shortest. It was past its bloom and bore small round fruit—bolls subtoned much like those of the carrot family. The bolls had not burst open yet and retained their seeds. Dersu cleared the grass away round the plant, picked off its fruit and wrapped them in a rag. Then he asked me to hold up the stalks as he set to digging out the roots. Utmost care was required to preserve intact all the fibrils of the roots. Then he bore the herb to the riverside and carefully washed away the clots of earth clinging to the roots.

I helped him as well as I could. Bit by bit the earth came off, exposing a bifurcated root four and a half inches long. Dersu said it was a male specimen. So this was ginseng, the miraculous herb that healed all maladies and returned youth's vitality to the aging body! Dersu cut the roots away from the plant, and wrapped both in moss and birch bark. Then he said a prayer, picked up kitbag and rifle, and exclaimed:

"You very lucky, captain!"

I asked what he intended to do with his find. Sell it, he said, and buy cartridges. This put the idea in my head of buying the ginseng myself and paying Dersu a better price than he could expect from Chinese traders. But when I voiced my intention the effect it caused was totally unexpected. He pulled the birch-bark package from under his shirt and proffered it to me, insisting that I should accept it without payment. I declined, and my refusal surprised and offended him.

Later I learned that it was a native custom to make presents, for which the giver received articles of equal value in return

## 11. AMBA

Next day an oppressive dense fog enveloped the countryside. It was grey and cheerless, and bitterly cold.

The men were still stowing away our equipment and saddling the horses when Dersu and I, who had each had a quick cup of tea, started on our way. I usually set out before the others, because I was making surveys and advanced slowly. The caravan had ample time to catch me up.

But the preceding evening Dersu warned me that these parts were infested with tigers, and advised me to stay with the main body.

The Ussuri taiga is extraordinarily dense, so dense, in fact, that a man can see no farther than several yards. Frequently we came as close as four or five yards to the hide-outs of various forest denizens, and only the noise the animal made, and the snapping of twigs, told us the direction in which it had fled.

We were in just that kind of taiga now. The weather was foul. There was a persistent drizzle, and deep puddles impeded our progress. The grass was damp, and rain-water dripped from the trees. An uncanny silence reigned in the forest. It was as though all life had died out. Even the woodpeckers had vanished.

"I can't make it out," I said to my companion. "Is it foggy, or raining? D'you think it will clear up, Dersu?"

The Gold glanced up at the sky; then he looked round, and replied after striding on in silence for some time:

"Earth, mountains, forests—all are the same as man. They are sweating just now."

And he added, putting his hand to his ear:

"Listen! They breathe—like people."

It was about eleven in the morning, high time for our pack-horses to come up. Yet there was no sign of them.

"Let's wait," I said to my companion.

He stopped without a word, leaned his rifle against a tree, and dug into his pockets for his pipe. But he could not find it.

"I dropped it on the way," he exclaimed vexedly.

He wanted to retrace his steps and look for it, but I advised him to wait, certain that the men behind us would find it and bring it along. We waited about twenty minutes, the old man on tenter-hooks for want of a smoke. He could stand it no longer and picked up his rifle.

"Pipe must be near. I'll go look."

By that time I was not a little alarmed by the absence of the caravan, and agreed to accompany Dersu. He walked in front, speaking to himself and shaking his head as usual.

"Getting old," he muttered. "Weak in the head, or something. How can...."

The end of the sentence stuck in his throat. He stopped dead, backed away, and then, bending, examined the ground at his feet. There was embarrassment in his face as he whispered to me:

"Look, captain, it's Amba. He followed us. Very bad. Fresh tracks—made only a moment ago."

The fresh imprints of a large feline paw were clearly visible in the mud. When we had come this way a short while before, they had not been there. I remembered that clearly. Furthermore, Dersu would never have missed them if they had. The beast was obviously stalking us.

"He is near," Dersu uttered. "Stood here long time when we stopped to look for pipe. As we came back he bounded away. Look, captain, no water in his footprint."

There were puddles all about us. But the depressions left by the tiger's paws were still dry. There was no doubt that the beast had made them only a few minutes before and had hidden in the underbrush at our approach.

"He didn't go far, captain. I savvy," said Dersu. "Wait."

For a few minutes we stood rooted to the ground, hoping the tiger would give itself away. But the silence was deadly. There was something ghoulish and frightening in it.

"Your rifle loaded?" Dersu asked in a whisper. "Must be very careful. If you see hole or fallen tree must look properly. Very properly. It's Amba!"

His eyes scrutinized every shrub and tree.

We marched in this way for about half an hour, Dersu in front, his eyes glued to the path, and I behind him.

At last we heard voices. It was a Cossack cursing a horse, and several minutes later our party heaved into sight. Two of the horses were covered with mud from hoof to head, and so were their saddles. They had stumbled in crossing a narrow watercourse and fallen into a bog. It was this that had held up the caravan. Just as I had expected, the men had found Dersu's pipe along the way and now restored it to him.

I intended to call a halt, for we would now have to repack the saddles, redistribute the loads, and do something about cleaning the horses. Besides, it was time to make tea. But Dersu was against it. We should just set right the saddles, he advised, and go on, for there was a hunting lodge in the vicinity, and he proposed that we should camp there.

I agreed. The men set to work on the pack-animals, while Dersu and I resumed our journey.

We had made no more than two hundred steps when we again discovered tiger tracks. The beast was on our trail, and again avoided a direct encounter when it sensed our approach. Dersu stopped, turning his face to where the tracks led, and shouted loudly and indignantly:

"Why you follow us, Amba? What do you want? We are not in your way. Isn't there room enough in the taiga?"

He shook his rifle menacingly. I have never seen him so excited. He was obviously convinced that Amba, the tiger, heard and understood his words, and would either accept his challenge or leave us alone and make off. After waiting some five minutes he heaved a sigh of relief, lit his pipe, put his rifle on the shoulder, and strode off confidently along the path.

His face assumed its usual expression of indifferent concentration. He had shamed the tiger and had made him retreat.

After about an hour's walk the forest thinned. A large clearing opened before us. The long march through the taiga had fatigued us and our eyes sought for a soothing landscape. For that reason, our joy at coming to the meadow is easily imagined.

"Kwandahow," Dersu said. "Soon we shall find the hunting lodge."

The clearing was densely overgrown with bracken. A narrow strip of solonetz* marshland bordered it on the right, frequented at night, as Dersu said, by red deer and wild goats which relished its crowfoots and loved to chew its damp salty soil.

"Today we hunt," Dersu said, pointing at the marshland.

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* *Solonetz*—dark, strongly alkaline soil. — *Tr.*

At about three in the afternoon we finally found the lodge. It was made of cedar bark by Chinese hunters, and the smoke from its fire-place was drawn off through two openings to drive away the mosquitos. There was a brook in our way and we had a good deal of trouble getting the horses across it.

Meanwhile, the weather, to use Dersu's phrase, continued "to sweat." The frowning skies had cleared in the morning. The fog had risen somewhat. There were gaps in it. The rain had ceased. But it was just as damp as before.

I decided to spend the night at the lodge. The prospect of hunting in the solonetz marsh was irresistible, considering that we had no meat and had fed entirely on rusks the preceding four days.

Within several minutes there was that cheerful bustle in the camp that is so familiar to all who have travelled in the taiga. The horses, relieved of their packs, rolled about in the grass for a bit, and then went off to graze.

We put the packs in a pile and covered them with a tarpaulin to protect them in case of rain.

In the meantime, someone made a fire and boiled water. Whenever we made a halt Dersu always showed extraordinary industry. He ran from tree to tree, gathered birch bark, cut rods and poles, pitched tents, dried clothes—his own and the others'—and had the knack of laying virtually smokeless fires.

An August day, particularly a dull one, is short. The fog rose to the mountain-tops, and only tatters of it still hung among the bushes, suggestive of ghosts.

We had a quick dinner, and then Dersu and I went hunting, following a path that led from the bivouac to the marshland. Deer and goat tracks were everywhere. The black solonetz was almost completely devoid of vegetation. The undersized trees along its edges looked sickly. The soil was trampled--quite obviously a favourite haunt of the deer.

We chose a fine hiding-place to lie in wait for the animals. I leaned my back against a stump and sized up the lay of the land. The darkness near the bushes and under the trees was rapidly growing denser. Dersu took long to settle down. He cut some twigs to clear the view, and for some reason bent the birch that grew behind his back.

A dead silence reigned over forest and field, broken only by the monotonous buzzing of the mosquitos.

It was getting darker and darker. The trees and shrubs assumed indefinite shapes, much like those of living beings, and seemed to move from place to place. They looked to me like deer. I tightened my hold on the rifle, and several times was on the point of firing but every time a glance at Dersu's composed face put me straight. The illusion faded, and the fancied outlines of a deer again assumed the shape of shrub or tree.

Dersu sat like a marble statue. He fixed his eyes on the shrubs near the marsh and calmly awaited his prey. On one occasion he sat up and raised his rifle, and my heart missed a beat. I strained my eyes in vain to see what he had spotted, but soon noticed that Dersu relaxed. It had grown pitch-dark. The solonetz marsh and the shapes of shrubs and trees were no longer discernible. Mosquitos mercilessly attacked the neck and arms. I covered my face with a net. Dersu did not. Mosquitos, it appeared, did not bother him.

Suddenly I heard a rustling. It came from the bushes on the other side of the marsh. I glanced at Dersu. He craned his neck and was straining his eyes to pierce the darkness. At times the rustling grew clearly audible. At others it diminished or died down altogether. Someone was cautiously stealing towards us through the thicket. That was certain. I fancied it to be a deer on its way to chew some of the salty soil—slender and fleet-footed, and with a magnificent pair of ramified antlers. Unmindful of the mosquitos, I threw back the net and became all eyes and ears. To my mind the deer was no more than sixty or seventy paces away from us.

Then a menacing growl exploded in my ears, much like a thunder-clap.

"Gr-r-r!"

Dersu clutched at my arm.

"It's Amba!" he exclaimed in a frightened voice.

A kind of languor took hold of me. My legs were heavy as lead. I experienced a sensation familiar to all who have had a sudden, stupefying fright. And yet there was a mingling of curiosity and awe, and a sense of elation that grips the hunter in face of game.

"Bad!" Dersu was saying. "This is Amba's hunting ground. He is angry."

He may have been talking to himself. It seemed to me that he was scared.

"Gr-r-r!"

This second growl, bursting upon the quiet of night, brought Dersu to his feet. I thought he was going to fire his rifle. And I was stunned to see him put his shooting-piece down and enter upon the following discourse:

"All right, Amba," he said, "don't be angry. We didn't know this was your hunting ground. We'll go. There's room enough in the taiga for all of us."

The Gold raised his arms in Amba's direction. Then he dropped to his knees and mumbled something in his native tongue, striking his head against the ground. The effect this had on me was one of pity for the old hunter.

Finally he rose slowly to his feet, picked up his rifle, and motioned to me to go.

"Come," he said curtly, and strode off through the thicket towards the path without waiting for my reply.

I followed him. His composure and the confidence with which he strode along the path reassured me; I sensed there was no danger of the tiger following or daring to attack us.

After some two hundred paces I paused and attempted to talk Dersu into reversing our decision.

"No," he said firmly. "I never shoot Amba in company. If you shoot, I shall no longer be your friend."

After this little speech he walked on in silence. I fell back, toying with the idea of continuing the hunt on my own. But a sensation of terror overtook me, and I ran after my companion.

Not a word was spoken between us all the way to camp. Each was absorbed in his own thoughts. Finally, I regretted aloud that I failed to see the tiger.

"Oh, no!" Dersu replied warmly. "It's no good to see Amba! My people say lucky men never see him."

He sighed, and went on after a pause:

"I often saw Amba. Shot him for nothing one time. Now I'm afraid. Some day I shall be very unlucky."

There was such depth of feeling in the Gold's words that I again experienced a sense of pity for him, reassuring him and trying to change the subject.

In an hour we came to the bivouac. The horses shied and snorted, frightened by our approach. The men round the fire came to life. Two of them hurried to meet us.

"Something's bothering the horses," one said. "They're on edge, and won't eat. There's some wild beast behind all this."

I ordered the Cossacks to bridle the pack-animals, make fires, and post an armed sentry.

Dersu kept silent all evening, labouring under the impression of our encounter with the tiger. He went to bed after the evening meal but kept tossing from side to side and muttering under his breath.

In the evenings Dersu and I often spoke about hunting wild beasts, and forest fires, and he had a plentiful stock of animal stories. I learned from him, for instance, that some twenty years before there was a migration of tigers from west to east, which lasted two winters. In his opinion it was a mass migration from the Sungari River to Sikhota-alin.

On several occasions I questioned Dersu about the time he killed a tiger, but the Gold would either keep silent or try to change the subject. Yet, in the end I gained my point.

It had been on the Futsing River in the month of May. Dersu was walking along the valley through an oak grove, a small dog at his side. At first the animal had run playfully in front of him. Then it began to show signs of alarm. Dersu decided that his dog was afraid of the bear tracks they had passed, and walked on unconcernedly.

The dog's alarm grew. The animal pressed closely to Dersu's legs. It turned out that a tiger was prowling in the vicinity. Upon sighting a man it had hidden behind a tree. Unaware of its presence, Dersu headed straight for it. The closer he came, the more assiduously the tiger tried to conceal itself. It virtually compressed itself into a ball. Still ignorant of the danger, Dersu pushed his whining dog away with his foot. In the same instant the tiger broke cover, bounding into the open, lashing its flanks furiously with its tail, and growling.

"Stop yelling!" Dersu had shouted. "I won't touch you. Don't be angry."

But the tiger growled on, bounding a few paces to the side. The Gold shouted at it again, urging it to go, but the tiger stood its ground. Then Dersu warned it again, raising his rifle and taking aim:

"All right! You don't go—I'll shoot. Don't blame me."

Just then the tiger ceased growling and trotted away into the shrubbery. Dersu should have held fire. But he did not. As the tiger came to the top of a near-by mound he pulled the trigger. The tiger, he saw, fled to the thickets. Dersu resumed his journey.

About four days later, on his way back, Dersu happened to be passing the mound again. He saw three crows up in the branches of a tree, one of them cleaning its beak against a twig. It flashed across Dersu's mind that he must have killed the tiger, and, indeed, he found the dead beast on the other side of the mound. One of its flanks was crawling with maggots. The Gold was horrified at having shot Amba in retreat. The thought that he had needlessly killed a tiger has been giving him no rest ever since. Sooner or later, he felt, he would have to pay dearly for it.

"I'm afraid, very afraid," he concluded his tale. "Before I always went alone, and never had fears. Now, if I see something—I fear; if I see animal tracks—I fear; if I sleep alone in the taiga—I fear."

He fell silent, his eyes fixed upon the flames of the campfire.

## 12. ACCURSED SPOT

Closer to the Sikhota-alin timber trees gave place more and more to lesser species, and in the end, at the source of the river, there was nothing but a mossy and thin growth of spruce, larch and fir. The roots spread along the surface, only thinly covered with moss. A man could single-handedly uproot a twenty-year-old specimen. The trees had a short and precarious life. They died from their tops down, and often dead-wood stood upright for a long time, until the lightest touch brought it down in dust.

Forests of that kind are always desolate. There are no animals in them, no birds, no buzzing insects. Their general colour is a monotonous brownish grey. The underbrush is conspicuous by its absence—even bracken and sedge. There is only moss, whichever way you turn—underfoot, on the stones, and among the branches. Taiga such as this wakens a sense of dreary gloom. The deadly silence in it is only broken by the melancholy piping of the wind in the tree-tops, and there is something eerie and ominous in the sound of it. Natives regard such places as the haunt of evil spirits.

Towards the close of day we were still a bit short of the pass and called a halt in the foothills of the Sikhota-alin.

Dersu roused me at dawn on August 12. After breakfast he and I left camp. The Cossacks were told to follow after saddling the horses. In the meantime, I meant to gauge the height of the pass across the Sikhota-alin.

A breath-taking view opened to our eyes from the top of the mountain. The earth below was like a sea, and the hills like enormous fossilized waves. The outlines of the nearest peaks were weird and grotesque, and the peaks beyond them lost in a haze of bluish fog. Farther on it was even hard to tell a mountain peak from a cloud. But from this great height I easily made out the pattern of the mountain folds and river courses.

On completing the survey we descended to the Wan valley and after some four miles stopped to wait for our caravan. Dersu squatted on the river-bank and busied himself with his footwear while I went on.

At that point the footpath twisted some 120 degrees. Looking back, I found Dersu sitting where I had left him. He motioned to me to go on.

At the edge of the forest I spotted some wild pigs, but they made off before I had time to fire. I ran to cut them off and caught up with them several minutes later. At least I thought I did. Something flashed by in the thickets, and when the dark object came to a stop I raised my rifle and fired. At the same instant a cry rang out followed by a pained groan. I was struck by the horrible thought of having hit a human being. What I saw when I dashed up to the site of the mishap burst upon me like a bolt from the blue. It was Dersu. I had hit Dersu. He lay on the ground, leaning on his left elbow, his right hand clapped to his eyes. I bent over him and hurriedly asked in a fear-stricken voice where he was hit.

"In the back," he replied.

Feverishly, I set to removing his jacket and shirt, both of them badly torn. When I saw his bare back I heaved a sigh of relief. There was no open wound, just an angry bruise about the size of a copper coin. Only then I noticed that I was shaking as in a fever. Dersu quickly regained his self-control, and, noting my distress, tried to cheer me up.

"All right, captain! Not your fault. I was behind. You could not know I came in front."

I helped him to a sitting position and wanted to know how he came to be between the pigs and myself. It developed that he spotted them at the same time as I. His hunter's instinct got the better of him. He jumped to his feet and pursued the animals. I had taken a circuitous route. Dersu, meanwhile, followed in the tracks of the boars straight as the crow flies, and soon came to be ahead of me. The colour of his jacket, much like that of the pigs, had deceived me. I fired.

The bullet had torn through his jacket and bruised his back. The shock paralyzed his legs.

About ten minutes later the men came up with the pack-animals. I smeared his injury with iodine, had one of the horses relieved of its pack, which was distributed among the other animals, and we lifted Dersu into the saddle. We then departed from that accursed spot.

Towards the close of day Dersu regained his composure. But not I. The thought that I fired at the man to whom I owed my life gave me no rest. I cursed the day, and the wild pigs, and hunting generally. Had my shot gone a fraction of an inch to the left, or had my finger trembled as I pulled the trigger, Dersu would have been dead! I could not get a wink of sleep all night. My heated imagination conjured up pictures of the forest, the pigs, and of Dersu sprawling on the ground. Several times during the night I jumped up from the k'ang in a fit of terror and left the fanza, hoping that the fresh air would clear my head. I told myself over and over that Dersu was alive, that he was with me, but nothing helped. I made a fire and tried reading, but soon remarked that my thoughts drifted away from the book. At long last it began to dawn. To my great relief the cook rose to make breakfast, and I set to helping him.

In the morning Dersu was better. The pain in his back subsided. He could walk, but still complained of a headache and weakness. Again I had one of the horses put at his disposal.

In the lower reaches of the Wanho we came upon an old fence erected in the path of forest animals going to water. It was made partly of fallen timber and partly of living trees. The dead-wood was held fast with stakes, so the animals could not break through it. At certain intervals gaps were left in the fencing, leading to pits artfully camouflaged with grass and leaves. At night, deer going to their watering place came upon the fence and, in going round it, fell into the traps. Such fences are sometimes as much as 30 miles long and have about 200 pits.

The fence on the Wanho was abandoned. The Chinese had not visited it for months. In one of the pits we found a living hind. It had apparently fallen in three days before. We stopped and discussed ways of saving it. One of the men volunteered to descend into the pit, but Dersu objected. The red deer might kill itself in the scuffle that was sure to ensue, and might even injure the daring hunter. It was finally decided to pull it out with lassoes. Two of the nooses, spread on the bottom of the pit, caught the deer's legs. A third noose was secured round its neck. The animal was nearly strangled by the time we drew it to the surface, but the instant the nooses were removed it rolled its eyes. After regaining its breath, it rose from the ground and staggered off towards a brook at the edge of the forest, where it drank greedily, totally oblivious of our presence.

Dersu was indignant that the Chinese had not filled the pits in when they abandoned the fence. In an hour we came to a fanza. Dersu, who was quite well again, wanted to go and tear down the fence, but I advised him to rest until the next day. After dinner I ordered the Chinese to demolish the traps and sent Cossacks to make sure that they filled in all the pits.

At dusk the Cossacks came back, reporting that in three of the pits they found two dead deer and a living roe.

We camped all of the next day. The weather was uncertain—mostly dull and rainy. The men washed their underwear, mended their clothes, and cleaned their rifles. Dersu recovered fully, which gave me great joy.

## 13. RETURN TO THE SEA

We climbed the pass, followed the stream due east, and close on four o'clock came to the valley of the Inhsia-Lahsiaho (Silver Cliff Valley).

The river swarmed with chars. The men amused themselves with hook and line, while I took my rifle and went to explore the mountains. I found nothing of interest, and at dusk descended to the river-bank. Suddenly I heard a splashing in a near-by pit and approached its edge stealthily to discover two raccoon dogs. They were so deeply absorbed in fishing that they failed to notice my presence. Standing with their forelegs in the water, they snapped at the little fish darting by them with their teeth. I could not tear myself away from the sight. They would quit fishing at times and attack the shrews instead, hurriedly burrowing in the earth. To my regret, one of the raccoons raised its head, looked my way attentively, and emitted a sound much like a dog's yelp. Both of them vanished in the grass and, long as I waited, did not return to the riverside.

At the bivouac all was well. After the evening meal we stayed up for an hour, each doing some work, and topped it off with tea.

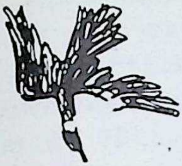
Some two miles from the river-mouth we came to marshland. Sand dunes and puddles of stagnant water showed where the old shore line was in the past. River deposits and sea wash had done their work, conquering this area from the sea. An elongated lake among the dunes about a mile from shore was probably the deepest part of the former bay. But we discovered that it was almost entirely overgrown with grass. A multitude of ducks perched on its surface.

Dersu and I stayed behind to shoot some ducks, while our main body moved on. There was no point in picking off ducks swimming in the lake. There would be no way of retrieving them without a boat. So we waited for birds in flight. I had a fowling-piece and Dersu his rifle. I felt constrained to praise his marksmanship—he rarely missed.

"Before I used to shoot good," he replied. "Never missed the mark. Not so good now."

As he spoke a duck flew by; Dersu quickly raised his rifle and fired. The duck, mortally wounded, hurtled to earth head over heels. My glance shifted in admiration from the spread-eagled bird to Dersu's face. He was overjoyed, and suggested that I should throw up a few of the egg-sized stones lying about us. I flung ten of them into the air, and he struck eight in flight. His eyes were aglow. He looked at me triumphantly, but it was not mere vanity that spoke in him. He was pleased that he could still make his living by hunting.

We stayed by the lakeside for several hours. Time passed rapidly. The golden rays of the setting sun flooded



the valley when we gathered up our booty of ducks and hurried after the main party. A broad strip of sand lay between us and the string of pack-horses that looked much like a desert caravan some two miles away.

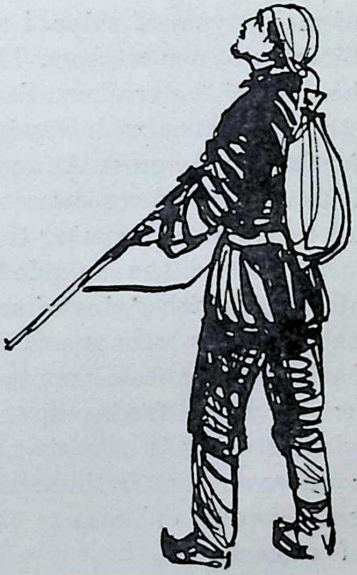
The Cossacks halted close by a small fanza built from driftwood near the shore. The hut was occupied by two Chinese shell-hunters. I have never seen anyone more hospitable than that pair.

We were fatigued. Furthermore, I had blistered my heel. What we needed was a day's rest.

My sore foot kept me awake all night. I was greatly relieved when the day began to dawn. Sitting by the fire I watched nature awakening from its night's sleep. The cormorants were the first to rise. They winged their way unhurriedly over the sea, all in one direction, apparently to their hunting grounds. Coveys of ducks flew over the grassy lake. A deep silence reigned over sea and earth.

Dersu was up before the others. He made tea. The sun peeped out from behind the watery expanse, almost like a living being, broke away from the horizon and climbed high into the sky.

"Magnificent!" I exclaimed, captivated by the sight. And Dersu retorted:



"He is the chief. If he dies—everything dies."

After a brief pause he continued:

"The earth also." Pointing north-east, he added: "Head there," and then turning south-west, "and legs there."

"Fire and water are also two strong men. If fire and water die—everything dies."

His words breathed a primitive animalism, but were nonetheless strikingly profound. Our voices roused the Cossacks.

All day I sat in one spot, nursing my foot. The men also rested, rising only to attend to the horses.

The weather was changeable. The westerly winds were raw, and the nights cold. Autumn was near.

My foot was soon better, and we resumed our journey.

Where the Tetu River fell into the sea we found neither bay nor cove—only small indentations in the shore line, littered with seaweed. The recesses were the haunt of many types of snipe. I spotted the fast-running East Siberian oyster catchers. They waded about in the water heedless of the breakers. Sandpipers kept in small flocks, strutting about with dignity on their red legs, looking for food in the grass. At our approach they took anxiously to the air, flying seawards at first, then veering sharply all together, and coming to rest on the shore.

We spotted the amiable Ussuri plovers where seaweed alternated with strips of sand. The birds looked fussily under slivers, stones and sea-shells, and kept running back and forth from sand to water. And every time a big breaker licked farther up the shore than usual they took wing, staying in the air until the wave retreated. The cormorants kept farther away from shore. They dived to great depths and rose to the surface far from the place of submersion.

Numerous sea-gulls raced low over the sea. The East Siberian laughing gulls were most conspicuous among them. At times, they came down on the water, raising an unholy din that, indeed, resembled human laughter. The gulls rose from the water in turn, flying over each other and settling on the waves again, as though playing leap-frog, trying to strike one another with their bills in the act, and snatch away the neighbour's spoils.

On the other side, above the mouth of the Tetuho, we glimpsed two white-tailed sea eagles on the look-out for prey. Suddenly they both swooped down to the shore, and all the crows, gulls and snipe made way for them unprotestingly.

After several days of rest on the sea-shore we broke up into two groups: Dersu and I, and four Cossacks, went up the Tetuho; the rest stayed behind to explore the coastline.

It was the spawning season. Salmon in their thousands were ascending the river. In their urge to reach the rapids these game fish, weighing from 7 to 11 lbs., literally flooded the river. Some ungovernable force drove them against the current, and they battled bravely against all obstacles.

The salmon eat nothing at spawning time, drawing upon the reserves of vital energy that they accumulate at sea. We overlooked the river from the overhanging mountain terraces, and saw everything that passed below. There was so much fish that in places the river-bottom was totally shut out from view. It was a fascinating sight to watch salmon passing the rapids. The fish advanced in zigzags, tumbled from side to side and turned somersaults—and yet made steady progress. Whenever waterfalls rose in their way, they leaped out of the water, trying to cling to the stones and crags. And then, bruised and battered, they reached the source of the river, deposited their spawn, and died.

We attacked the fish with ravenous appetites at first, but soon it palled and stuck in our throats.

After our long rest at the sea-shore men and horses made brisk progress.

The distant mountains were mantled in a bluish haze of evening fog. The day was drawing to a close. Soon a silence settled over the scene, but as it grew darker I heard indistinct sounds in the valley below us. They were human voices, mingled with the noise of metal striking metal. Some of these sounds were far away, and some quite near.

"What is it, Dersu?" I asked.

"Chinese driving pigs," he replied.

I thought he meant that the Chinese were driving their pigs back into the pen for the night, but Dersu explained that no one in his right mind would ever let pigs out of the pen in the first place, with the maize and vegetables still unharvested.

We walked on. Soon I saw lights. They were not in the fanzas, but some distance away from them.

"Chinese driving pigs," Dersu said again, and again I failed to grasp his meaning.

At last we rounded the cliffs and came to a clearing, where the sounds became more distinct. A Chinese was shouting in a high-pitched voice, and beating the bottom of a basin with a stick. On hearing us approach he shouted louder and lit a pile of fire-wood that lay in the path.

"Wait, captain," Dersu warned. "Better not go now. He may shoot. He thinks we are pigs."

Now I began to see light. The Chinese had mistaken us for wild pigs and was liable to shoot. Dersu shouted to him. The Chinese replied and ran in our direction with a strange mingling of fright and joy.

I called a halt. The Cossacks unsaddled the horses and pitched tents, while I entered the fanza and questioned its occupants. They complained bitterly of wild pigs, which for three nights running ravaged their fields and vegetable gardens. In two nights they had destroyed almost all the vegetables. The maize alone was still intact. But they had seen the beasts prowling near the maize field in the day-time, and there could be no question that the pigs would return after nightfall. The Chinese urged money on me for standing a night's vigil and firing my rifle into the air. Then he hurried away and resumed his noise-making. Another Chinese joined him somewhere up in the mountains, and a third some distance away. The discordant sounds spread through the valley and melted in the quiet of the night. After dinner we decided to hold a chase.

When the twilight died, the Chinese made a fire near the maize field. Dersu and I took our rifles and walked into the night. The Chinese followed us. He kept on shouting. I was on the point of asking him to stop, but Dersu said it would do no harm: the wild pigs were certain to come anyway. I sat on one side of the maize field, and Dersu on the other. The smoke from the fire rose vertically into the sky, while a red light leaped along the ground in indistinct blotches, falling on the maize, the grass and the stones.

We did not have long to wait. A noise arose beyond the field, opposite the place where we lay in ambush. It increased markedly. The boars dug the earth and snorted in displeasure at the nearness of men. Yet they paid little heed to the shouts of the Chinese and were making straight for the maize in spite of the fires. In a minute or two we saw them. The ones in front instantly began to feed. We fired almost simultaneously, Dersu bringing down one animal, and I another. The pigs bolted, but fifteen minutes later reappeared. Two more shots brought down two more of them. A wild pig rushed at us, its mouth wide open, but Dersu's shot stopped it dead. The Chinese was throwing fire-brands at the beasts. Shots rang out in quick succession. But it was all of no avail. The pigs just would not be stopped. I was on the point of approaching the killed animals, but Dersu held me back. He said there might be wounded animals among them, and those were dangerous. After a bit of this, we went to the fanza, had tea, and turned in. But sleep was out of the question. The Chinese kept shouting and hammering on his basin all through the night. It was only at dawn that deep slumber overtook me.

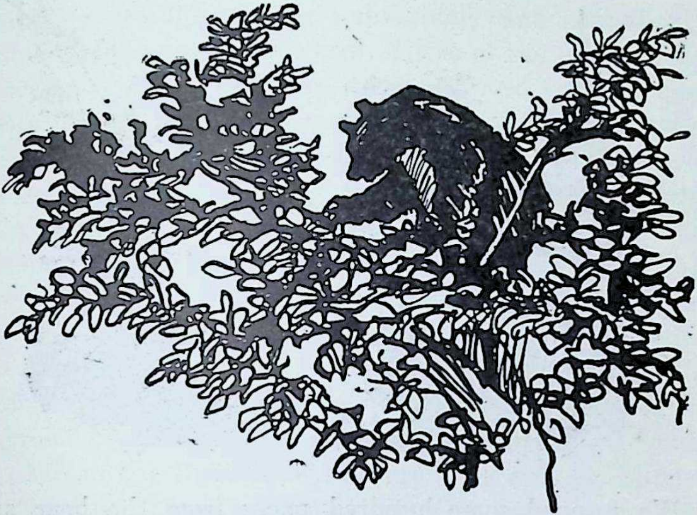
I rose at about nine and asked about the pigs. Dersu informed me that we had shot five of them, but that after we left the boars overran the maize field and ravaged it to the last stalk. The Chinese was deeply distressed.

We took along only one of the killed pigs, and left the others behind.

According to the Chinese there were fewer wild pigs in the past. They had multiplied in ten years, and if it had not been for the tigers, who accounted for so many of them, they would have overrun the entire taiga.

After bidding the Chinese farewell, we went on our way.

Dersu and I went in advance of the main body. Beyond the river the path ascended a mountain-side. We made a brief halt. I busied myself with my footwear, while



Dersu was filling his pipe. He was just raising it to his mouth when something arrested his attention. His eyes were fixed upon the forest. A minute later he burst out laughing, and said:

"See, how clever!"

"Who?" I asked.

He pointed silently with his arm, but I saw nothing until Dersu told me to look up among the branches. One of the trees was quivering—once, twice, again and again. We rose and advanced stealthily, discovering that it was a white-breasted bear devouring acorns in the tree-top.

White-breasted bears are smaller than the brown variety. They make their dens in the hollows of ancient poplars. Their winter sleep begins early. They gnaw air vents higher up the trunk, and hunters can tell their hide-outs by the hoar-frost that forms around the edges of the holes.

We stopped some hundred paces from the bear and watched it. The animal was high up in the tree-top, where it had made something of a dais for itself. But many of the acorns were on branches out of the bear's reach. The bear shook the tree for all it was worth, and then glanced at the ground. Its tactics were sound. The acorns were ripe, but not ripe enough to tumble to the ground on their own. The bear descended the tree and searched for them in the grass.

"Who are you?" Dersu shouted to it.

The bear started up, cocked its ears, and sniffed the air. We did not stir. It relaxed and was about to resume its occupation when Dersu emitted a loud whistle. The bear rose on its hind legs and hid behind a tree, peeping out slyly. Just then the wind blew from behind us. The bear let out a yelp, pressed down its ears, and bolted. The Cossacks came up with the horses a few minutes later.

After dinner we sat round the fire. Suddenly something greyish-white flew by us unhurriedly and soundlessly. The men thought it was a bird. I was of the opinion that it was not. It did not flap its wings, and yet flew horizontally with a slight downward slant. A bat, I thought. The strange creature perched on an aspen and clambered up its trunk. Its colouring was so much like the tree's that it would have been undistinguishable if it were not moving. Some seven yards up the trunk the animal stopped and seemed to freeze to the spot. I raised my fowling-piece, but Dersu motioned to me to hold my fire. He quickly cut some small twigs and tied them to the end of a pole, obtaining something like a broom. He approached the asp then and raised the pole so it would not screen the light from our fire. The animal, blinded by the flames, did not budge. When the broom was raised high enough, Dersu pressed it against the trunk and told a Cossack to hold it fast. Meanwhile he climbed an adjacent branch, sat astride it, and took hold of his prey with the broom. The frightened little animal squealed and struggled.

It was a flying squirrel of the order of gnawing mammals. Along its sides it had an elastic fold of skin connecting its fore and hind legs, which enabled it to make long leaps from one tree to another. The squirrel's body was covered with a soft, silky, light grey fur, and there was a parting along its tail.

The flying squirrel is widespread in the Ussuri Territory, living in mixed forests, in birches and aspen. The specimen we caught was almost two feet long and six inches wide (including the spread-out membrane). The men crowded round the little animal. Its unique head with the long whiskers and large black eyes that could see in the dark, was particularly fetching. When all had satisfied their curiosity, Dersu raised the flying squirrel high over his head, uttered something loudly, and released it. The squirrel glided low over the ground and vanished in the darkness. I asked the Gold why he had let it go.

"He is neither bird nor mouse," he replied. "Why kill him?"

We spoke long with him on that subject. When I asked him what he thought was the most harmful beast of all, Dersu replied after a pause:

"A mole!"

And when I asked why, he said:

"Nobody wants to shoot him, nobody wants to eat him."

Dersu meant that the mole was a useless sort of animal.

## 14. RED DEER

In the taiga the end of August and early September is a particularly hectic time—the time when red deer bucks fight for their does. Hunters cut birch bark into ribbons about four inches wide, and roll them into spirals, making horns about two feet long that are sounded by drawing in air. With these they lure red deer.

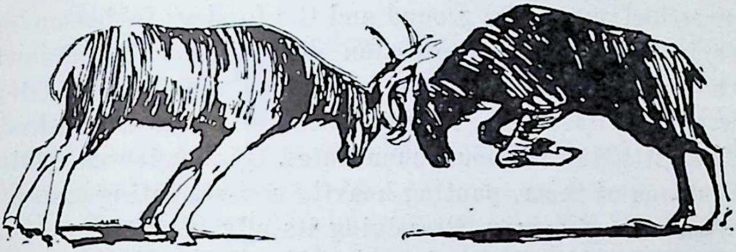
It is easy to shoot bucks during the mating season. Blinded by lust, they are totally oblivious of danger. Lured by the sound of the horn they come hard up to the hunter.

We had a good supply of provision and I would not let my Cossacks go deer-shooting. As for myself, I went into the taiga for the sake of seeing.

A mile from the bivouac, armed with lure horns, Dersu and I separated and went different ways. I chose a likely stump for my observation post where the underbrush was thinnest.

A hush fell over the forest as night descended.

Suddenly the mating call of a red deer resounded somewhere south of me, rolling through the forest and instantly echoed by a second call closer by. It was probably an old buck, for it started off in a deep bass that gradually rose to a treble and ended on a throaty octave. I replied with my birch-bark horn.



In no more than a minute I heard the snapping of twigs and glimpsed a stately buck. It advanced with graceful assurance, nodding its head and shaking free its antlers when they caught in the branches. I froze to the spot. The deer stopped and sniffed the air with head raised to ascertain the whereabouts of its adversary. Its eyes were burning, its nostrils dilated, its ears alert. I watched the magnificent creature for about two minutes and felt no call whatsoever to take its life. The deer, sensing the presence of an enemy, showed marked signs of impatience. It thrust at the earth with its antlers and, raising its head high, let out a powerful call. Vapour issued from its mouth. No sooner had its echo died than there came a far-away answering call. The buck started, its howl turning into a short furious bellow.

My attention was drawn by a light rustling and I saw the doe. By the time I turned my head again a second buck appeared, and the two grappled. They attacked each other with uncommon fury. I heard the heavy blows of their antlers, and the deep sighs that issued from their chests, mingling with their groans. Their hind legs were stretched out on the ground and the forelegs folded under their bellies. On one occasion their antlers locked, and the deer could not pull them apart. One of the bucks finally wrenched itself free, breaking the other's crown antlers. The battle lasted about ten minutes. By then it was plain that one of them, panting heavily and retreating step by step, must give way. Perceiving its advantage, the other attacked with increased vigour. The two vanished from view.

The noise of battle gradually subsided. One buck apparently was pursuing the other. The doe followed at some distance.

A sudden shot rang out. That, I thought, must be Dersu. And I realized that my pair of bucks was not the only pair in the forest. The forest was veritably filled with the mating calls of numerous deer.

It was growing darker rapidly. In the sky the final flares of twilight were feebly resisting the dark of night, which quickly approached from the east.

In half an hour I came to the bivouac to find Dersu back and sitting by the fire cleaning his rifle. He could have bagged several red deer, but settled on just a solitary hazel grouse.

We sat by the fire for some time, listening to the lowing of the deer. It gave us no sleep all night. I heard it through my slumbers, and kept waking up. The Cossacks sat cursing by the fire. Sparks rose into the sky like Roman candles, and died away.

At last it began to dawn. The mating calls abated. Only solitary over-amorous bucks still could find no rest, roaming the shadowy mountain slopes, roaring, but receiving no reply. Then the sun rose and the taiga plunged into silence.

That day the more ardent of the bucks began their calls when it was still quite light, first high up in the mountains, and then descending to the valley. I was eager to have another look at bucks in battle and invited Dersu to keep me company.

We crossed the river and plunged into the eerie half-light of the forest. Less than two miles from the camp we came to a quiet brook. The twilight turned denser with the dying sun. As darkness descended, more and more bucks joined the uncanny chorus. Their bewildering concert filled the forest with a confusion of sound. We stalked the animals without success. True, we had glimpses of them on several occasions, but they were blurred—either it was just the head and the antlers, or just the rump, or the legs.

At long last we spotted a magnificent specimen. Three does herded round it. The animals were restless and constantly on the move. We followed in their tracks. If it had not been for Dersu, I would surely have lost them. The buck led the way. It was obviously filled with a sense of its superiority over its rivals and responded to every challenging call. Suddenly Dersu stood stock-still. I heard an old buck's bellow from the direction in which he turned his ear, only the sequence of notes in its call was somewhat unusual.

"Hm," Dersu muttered. "You know who that was?

I said it must have been a very old buck.

"It's Amba," he whispered back. "Very cunning. Always cheats deer that way. Just now deer are too foolish. Amba will soon catch doe."

As if in reply to his words, our buck responded loudly to the tiger's decoying call. And the tiger instantly repeated his ruse. Its imitation of a deer's bellow was quite artful. It was only in the final notes that the bellow tailed off in a purr.

Amba was coming nearer and was likely to pass close by us. Dersu looked agitated. My heart jumped. A sense of fear crept over me. Then Dersu began to chant:

"A-ta-ta, ta-ta-ta!"

He fired into the air, ran to a birch, hurriedly peeled some bark, and brought a match to it. The dry birch bark flared up brightly, and the darkness about us thickened even more. The deer; startled by the report, bolted. And all was quiet again. Dersu tied some burning birch bark to the end of a stick, and we went back, lighting our way with the improvised torch. On crossing the river we came upon a path that brought us to our camp.

Near the bivouac a Cossack found the skeletons of two bucks, their antlers locked in a deadly embrace. The deer had been unable to come apart, and had starved to death. Birds of prey and wild beasts had picked their bones clean. Six men (three on each side) tried to disentangle the horns, but their efforts were wasted. The blows delivered by the deer must have been terrific. The tines had apparently bent under the impact and had become locked. Though our horses already had enough to carry, I decided to take along our unique find to the next settlement. There I would leave it with the Chinese for safe keeping.

After dinner Dersu kept us enthralled with his hunting stories. His life was peppered with the most stirring adventures. He related, for instance, how some ten years before he had hunted red deer in the early summer, when the animals grow their new antlers. It was in the upper reaches of the Daubiho, on one of its tributaries. Water had washed long, deep gullies into the mountainsides; the steep slopes were wooded. Dersu had with him his rifle, his hunting knife, and six cartridges. Near his camp he spotted a buck, and fired. But the bullet only wounded the animal. The deer stumbled, recovered, and ran for the forest. The Gold trailed it and fired four more shots at it, but all its wounds were not fatal. The buck was on the run, and Dersu fired the sixth and last shot. The deer toppled into a gully, which communicated with another, similar ravine. It was just where the two joined that the animal sprawled in the water, its neck and head resting on a stone. The wounded animal lifted its head. It was obviously breathing its last. And Dersu waited, smoking a pipe. He smoked two pipes before the buck expired. Then Dersu approached it to secure the head and the young antlers. The place was inconvenient for the operation: a thick alder grew hard by the water, and no matter how Dersu turned, he was obliged to stand on his right knee and set the left foot against a stone in the brook. He hung his rifle behind his back and now busied himself with the knife. He made no more than two cuts, however, when he heard a noise above the babbling water. Turning, he saw a tiger close by. The beast was aiming to step on a stone, missed it, and splashed into the water. The slightest movement would have cost the Gold his life. He froze on the spot and caught his breath. The tiger threw him a sidelong glance, but seeing an immobile shape, it moved on. It sensed, however, that the object it had just passed was not a stump or stone, but a living thing. Twice it looked back and sniffed the air suspiciously. Dersu's luck held out. The tiger was to the windward of him. The scent of deer's blood did not reach the beast, which clambered up the incline. Stones and sand tumbled into the brook from under its paws. It was only when it reached the top of the gully that it sensed the presence of a human being. The fur on its back stood on end, it roared and lashed its flanks with its tail. Dersu shouted wildly and ran for his life. The tiger leaped, came upon the deer, and stopped to sniff. That saved Dersu. He clambered out of the gully and kept running, running hard and long, like a roe pursued by wolves.

It struck his superstitious mind that the buck had really been Amba's property. That was why he, Dersu, had failed to kill it instantly in spite of six successive shots. He was surprised that he had not thought of that earlier. Anyhow, he has never again visited the gullies. The place was taboo. He had been warned.

## 15. BEAR HUNT

The Mutuho valley is the finest hunting ground on the coast. Deer, roes and wild pigs kept running past us out of the bush clover and the hazel shrubs. The Cossacks were frantic, and I had no end of trouble to keep them from a needless slaughter of game. At about three I gave the signal to halt.

I had always wanted to shoot a bear. Others did it single-handed, I said to myself, so why not I? It was a hunter's vainglory speaking in me, and I could not resist its call.

Many hunters say they did not experience fear when out alone against a bear, and usually stress the comic side of the hunt. Some say the bear takes to its heels at the sound of a rifle shot, and others that it rises on its hind legs and advances slowly upon the hunter—an excellent and easy target. Dersu had different views. He showed signs of anger when he heard these tales, spitting on the ground in disgust, but he never argued.

When he heard that I planned a bear hunt single-handed, he advised utmost caution and offered his services. But his injunctions only fired my imagination. I firmly resolved to have a try all on my own.

No more than 600 yards from our encampment I had already put up two roes and a boar. There was such a profusion of game, the forest was really more of a zoo where animals were allowed to go free.

After crossing a brook I stopped and waited amidst a thin growth of trees. Soon I saw a deer; it loped past me along the edge of the wood. Near by in the hazel shrubs wild pigs fussed with their squealing sucklings.

Suddenly snapping twigs and footsteps attracted my attention. It was someone with a measured and heavy gait. Fear coursed through me, and I had the impulse to run. Then I glimpsed a dark, hulking shape amidst the shrubbery. It was a large bear, somewhat taller than I, striding along an incline. The beast stopped off and on, burrowed about in the grass, turning over fallen logs and examining something under them. At about forty paces I took deliberate aim and pulled the trigger. Through the smoke I saw the bear start up with a roar and sink its teeth into the spot where it had been hit. There is only a blurred recollection of what happened after that. It all occurred so swiftly I could no longer make out the sequence of events. The bear was dashing headlong in my direction. There was a violent jolt. I fired a second time. When and how I had reloaded remains a mystery. Then, I think, I fell to the left. The bear, meanwhile, tumbled head over heels down the incline on my right. I have no idea how I got back on my feet, and how I managed to retain my hold on the rifle. I ran along the edge of the slope, and heard the noise of pursuit. But the bear was no longer running fast. It growled and sighed heavily as it bounded forward.

It struck me that I had not reloaded my rifle, and stopped to do it.

"Fire," I said to myself, "or you're done for."

I raised the rifle but saw neither fore nor rear sight. All I saw was a shaggy head, a wide-open mouth and an angry pair of eyes. My face, I felt, was distorted with fear.

I shall never believe hunters who claim that they aim as calmly at a beast rushing upon them as they would at an empty bottle. That is a lie, because the instinct of self-preservation is innate in every man. The sight of an infuriated beast cannot fail to agitate the hunter, and will inevitably affect his marksmanship.

When the bear was well-nigh upon me I fired almost at point-blank range. It fell, and I ran again. When I looked back I saw it rolling in the grass. Then I heard a noise to my right. My hair stood on end when, on turning instinctively, I saw the head of a second bear, which instantly drew back into the thicket. Noiselessly, I ran away from it and came to the river.

For about twenty minutes I walked up and down the bank to compose myself. It would be a shame to return to the camp empty-handed. Yet I did not know whether or not I had killed the bear. Furthermore, there was the second bear to reckon with. I prowled about the place until the sun sank below the horizon. Its rays, diverted from the earth, now shot upwards into the sky. I decided to take a look at the bears from afar. But the closer I approached the scene of my recent encounter the more frightened I became. My nerves were on edge. Every little rustle made me jump. I fancied myself in a ring of bears. They seemed to be following on my heels. Each minute I stopped and listened. At last I sighted the tree near which the wounded bear had fallen. My terror doubled, and I decided to go round it and look over the edge of the mountain slope. I would have to describe a circle round the place, and as I walked past thickets I froze dead in my tracks and threw stones. Something stirred in the bushes and I thought it was a bear, and turned to run. But it was Dersu. I hurried to him, unable to contain my joy. When he saw me, he rested on a stump and began filling his pipe. He told me he heard my shots and went to my aid. My tracks told him where I first fired at the bear, and that the bear had rushed me; further, he discovered that I had fallen, that the beast pursued me, and that I fired again. In short, he reproduced all that happened to me in minute detail.

"The wounded bear has apparently made off," I said to him.

"No," Dersu replied, pointing to a mound of fresh earth, "he is here."

I had heard from hunters that bears bury dead animals to let their meat decompose, after which they eat it. But I never heard of a bear burying another bear. Nor had Dersu, for that matter.

We soon dug up the beast, turning up the earth, the stones and the dead-wood that were piled on top of it.

I laid a fire, and Dersu disembowelled the bear. It was a large blackish specimen, much like an American grizzly.

About eight feet long and four feet tall, it weighed more than 700 lbs. It had a short snout, small ears and beady eyes. Its colossal strength was augmented by a pair of powerful fangs, and claws more than two inches long.

The curious thing about this variety of bears is its colouring, which is black in the south and approaches light brown farther north. It is good-natured enough when let alone, but has an ugly temper when wounded. Its diet is chiefly vegetarian, but when the chance turns up it is not loth to feast on meat and fish.

The brown bear builds its den under the roots of trees, in stone crevices, or simply in the ground. Like its Quaternary kinsmen, it likes to seclude itself in caves, and lives in them during the warm seasons as well as in winter. Its winter sleep begins late in the year, and sometimes it is found roaming through the taiga as late as December. It does not like to climb trees, presumably because of its great weight.

All my three bullets had found their mark. One lodged in the bear's side, another in its chest, and the third in the head.

It was already dark when Dersu completed his job. We added damp wood to the fire, so it would burn all night, and set off for camp.

The night was placid and cool. A full moon hung in the clear sky, and as its light increased, our shadows shortened and thickened. Along the way we again put up several boars. They scattered noisily in different directions. At last we saw a light among the trees. It was our bivouac.

After dinner the Cossacks turned in early. But my day's experience kept me awake. I got up and sat by the fire. Its reddish glare and the bluish light of the moon merged with the black shadows about me. Wild beasts prowled on the edge of the sleeping forest. Some of them approached to within a few paces of the bivouac. The roes were particularly curious. I lay down beside the Cossacks and sleep overpowered me.

Dersu roused us at the crack of dawn. The sun's rays had scarcely lit up the mountain-tops when we gathered up our things and set out. The road along the Mutuho up to the pass was littered with stones. Progress was extremely difficult. Crevices in the boulders and hollows between the roots of trees were veritable pitfalls. We were greatly concerned for the horses. They were liable to break their legs. It is a marvel how the unshod Chinese mounts navigate this stretch with their heavy packs.

After marching some four miles we turned due east towards the sea. There was something in the air ever since early morning, a kind of strange haze. The sky had turned from blue to leaden. The mountains far away were shut out from view. I pointed this out to Dersu and told him all I knew from meteorology about dry fogs.

"This is no fog," he replied curtly. "Smoke. I cannot see from where, because there's no wind."

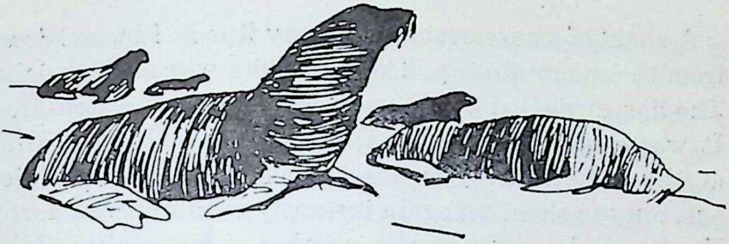
When we came to the top of the mountain we saw he was right. Large billows of whitish smoke rose from behind the mountains to the right of the Mutuho. Farther north the mountains were also shrouded in smoke. The forest fire had obviously spread over a large area. After admiring the scene for a few minutes we resumed our journey. On reaching the shore cliffs we turned left, rounding the chasms and promontories.

The wind carried strange sounds from down below, somewhat resembling the barking of dogs, but longer and huskier. Warily, I approached the edge of the precipice and looked over its side.

A host of sea-lions, big and small, lolled about on the beach.

The sea-lion belongs to the suborder of pinnipeds and the family of eared seals. It is a fairly large animal up to thirteen feet long, ten feet wide at the shoulders, and weighing between 1,400 and 1,700 lbs. It has small ears, attractive black eyes, large jaws, and powerful fangs. The neck is relatively long, and the fur on it is somewhat longer than on the rest of the body. The feet, or fins, are bare-soled and large. The male sea-lion is usually double the size of the female. It occurs all along the coast of Primorye Territory. Natives kill it primarily for its thick skin, which they use in the manufacture of footwear and dog harnesses.

The sea-lions were obviously having a fine time basking on the stones in the spray of the surf. They stretched themselves languorously, threw back their heads, raised their hind limbs as high as they could, turned over on their backs, and then, quite abruptly, slipped off the stones into the water. But the stones never remained unoccupied. New heads instantly appeared out of the water and the vacancies were hastily filled. The females and their young sprawled along the beach, while the males reclined farther away, near the caves worn in the cliffs by the action of the waves. The old sea-lions were a light brown. The young ones were darker. The latter, incidentally, bore themselves with a kind of jaunty swagger.



They turned their heads, raised high in the air, from side to side, and in spite of their clumsy bodies they were not devoid of a certain grace.

With typical Cossack rashness Murzin raised his rifle and aimed at the nearest sea-lion. But Dersu intervened, gently pushing aside the barrel.

"Don't shoot," he said quietly. "Cannot take it with us. It's bad to shoot for nothing."

The stamping ground of the sea-lions was indeed unapproachable from the land. It was closed in on the right and left by promontories that jutted far out into the sea, while sheer precipices, close to two hundred feet deep, cut it off from the mainland. The only approach was from the sea. We would have had to abandon the shot sea-lion. Dersu was right.

For twenty minutes we watched the sea-lions. I could not tear myself away from the fascinating sight. But someone touched my shoulder lightly, and I heard Dersu saying:

"Captain, we must go on."

It was easier marching along the horizontal crest than along the slope. We skirted the projecting pinnacles. When we again came to the path night had already come into its own. We still had to ascend a tall mountain and then descend to a saddle. The height of the climb, it turned out, was about 2,500 feet.

A shout of amazement escaped my lips as I looked down from the mountain-top. The forest fire was at its height. The flames girdled the mountains like lines of watch-fires. It was a majestic picture, and yet it was blood-curdling at the same time. Tongues of flame flickered and died out, only to shoot up again instantly with renewed force. They had already crossed a number of mountain saddles and were on the way down to the valleys. The tallest heights had not as yet succumbed to them. The fire was ascending in a regular circle, like a line of soldiers storming a fortress. The sky was lit up in the east and west. The glow in the east quivered and tossed, and that in the west was steady. The moon was rising. It peeped out from behind the horizon, rising irresolutely out of the sea and then climbing higher and higher, large, wan, and dully crimson.

"We must go, captain," Dersu whispered to me again.

We descended to the valley and encamped near a water source amidst a thin grove of oak-trees. Dersu made us clear the camp site of grass, and then started a forest fire of his own. The dry grass and autumn leafage burst into flame like gunpowder.

The wind drove the flames before it. The forest presented a wondrous sight. I watched the blaze. It travelled slowly over the fallen leaves, but leapt forward eagerly every time it came to patches of dry grass. The heat sucked in the fallen dry twigs, raising them into the air. They burned in the air. The bonfire spread rapidly, reaching the shrubs. A huge blaze shot up with a great deal of noise. A yellow birch with its shaggy bark instantly turned into a giant torch. But only for a minute or so; the bark burned out, and the flames fell. The older trees, whose core was dry, blazed on the root. And wherever the flames had passed wisps of white smoke rose here and there from the smouldering logs.

Terror-stricken animals and birds sought safety in flight. A hare darted close by me; a chipmunk hopped across the scattered smouldering dead-wood; and a spotted woodpecker flew from tree to tree with sharp cries of alarm.

I walked on and on in the wake of the fire without a thought about the way, until at last a feeling of hunger reminded me that it was time to return to camp. I fancied that the light from our campfire would guide me home, but on turning back I saw numerous lights everywhere: piles of dead-wood were still burning all round me. It was hard to tell which of the fires belonged to our camp. One of them seemed bigger than the others, and I headed for it. But it turned out to be a burning stump. Then I switched to another likely bonfire, and found that it was a burning stump as well. Thus I walked from fire to fire, gradually losing hope of ever finding the bivouac. Then I raised a yell. The reply came from quite the opposite direction than I had expected. I turned back and soon joined the company.

Dersu's alarm was well justified. Late at night the forest fire advanced upon us, but thanks to the Gold's precaution of scorching the terrain in our vicinity, it failed to find food for its flames and by-passed us. The night was warmer than we had expected, despite the cloudless sky. I always referred to Dersu for an explanation of all such puzzling phenomena, and always received a plausible reply. This time I also consulted him.

"Smoke all round stop the cold," he said.

That reminded me of the gardeners who protected their orchards from the morning frost with the aid of smoke fires.

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During the day we saw a red deer. It was grazing hard by a burning pile of dead-wood. It stepped unconcernedly over the flaming embers as it nibbled at the shrubs. All too frequent forest fires had apparently inured the animals to flame.

## 16. FOREST FIRE

Dersu spotted footprints along the path, and found a cigarette stub and a strip of blue cotton cloth. He deduced that two men had passed this way, and that they were not Chinese labourers, who would never have discarded a piece of cloth just because it was stained, and have a use for any old rag until it is worn to tatters. Furthermore, labourers could not afford cigarettes, and smoked pipes. The two, Dersu reckoned, were an idle pair. He showed us the spot where they had made a halt. One of them had changed his footwear. An abandoned cartridge-case showed that the men carried rifles.

As we advanced, Dersu made ever new discoveries. In the end he stopped.

"Two more men joined them," he said. "Now they are four, four evil men."

We decided to turn off the path and strike out across country. From the top of the nearest mountain we saw Plastun Bay some three miles away. To our left rose a tall mountain range, the Sinantsa River beyond it; at our backs was Lake Dolgoye, and to our right—an eroded ridge of mountains. Beyond that was the sea.

I thought there was no cause for alarm, and said so. But Dersu insisted that we descend to the brook and follow it north to the Tkhetipo River.

In an hour we came to the edge of a forest. Dersu went alone to reconnoitre and instructed us to await his return.

The day was on the wane. The marshes, lifeless and desolate, turned a monotonous yellow brown. The mountains, forbidding and dismal, were draped in a blue evening fog. As darkness fell, the distant forest fire burned more vividly against the black of the sky. There was still no sign of Dersu, though several hours had passed since his departure, and I grew restless.

A shout rang out suddenly somewhere far away, followed by four rifle shots, another shout, and still another shot. I had the impulse to run in that direction, but it struck me Dersu would have difficulty finding us if we left our present halting place.

In about twenty minutes the Gold returned. He had a troubled look and told us hurriedly that in trailing the four men to Plastun Bay he discovered a tent. In it were about twenty armed Chinese. They were khunkhutsi. As he was worming his way back through the shrubbery a dog caught his scent and raised an uproar. Three bandits took their rifles and pursued him. Meanwhile, he had stumbled into a quagmire. The Chinese ordered him to stop. He did not, and they opened fire. On reaching dry land he took careful aim and hit one of them. He saw the man fall. The other two bent over their wounded comrade, and Dersu made good his escape. To throw the bandits off the trail he ran in the wrong direction while within eyeshot, and then took a roundabout route to our halting place.

"Made a hole in my shirt," he said, showing us a bullet hole in his jacket. "We must go quick."

We marched on as quietly as we could. Dersu led us along a dry river-bed laid with boulders, and studiously avoided the paths.

At about nine in the evening we came to the Yotsi River. There were fanzas in sight, but we spent the night out in the open. I was bitterly cold and wrapped a tent round me, but the damp air chilled me to the bone nonetheless. No one slept. We were all impatiently waiting for the dawn. The night seemed endless.

We resumed our journey at the first hint of day. Dersu advised us to turn off the path and make for the hills. We did. But on fording the river and striking out into the tall grass we came face to face with an Udehei as he was stepping out of the bushes. He was startled, and so were we. But when he saw Cossacks among us he dug into his shirt and pulled out a letter. It was for me, informing me that a detachment of hunters under the command of a Chinese sergeant, Chen Pao, was scouring the vicinity for bandits. As I was reading the letter Dersu questioned its bearer, and the latter, in his turn, interrogated Dersu. It developed that Chen Pao and his thirty hunters had spent the night quite near us and were now approaching the Yotsiho.

In about twenty minutes we sighted them.

Chen Pao was a tall man of about forty-five, dressed in ordinary blue Chinese clothes. An air of smartness distinguished him from the common Chinese workman. His animated face bore traces of past hardships. The ends of his black moustache, touched with a hint of grey, drooped in typical Chinese fashion. His intelligent eyes gazed shrewdly out of a grave face, which was in striking contrast to the perpetual smile playing about his lips. He spoke slowly, in an even voice, weighing his answers.

Chen Pao's detachment consisted of Chinese and Udeheis, young, hardy, and well armed. Morale, I noticed at once, was at its best. All his orders were promptly executed, and he never had to repeat them twice.

Chen Pao greeted me with a blend of politeness and dignity. When he learned that Dersu had had an encounter with the bandits the night before, he wanted to know where the shooting took place, and drew a plan of the area in the sand with a twig. The bandits we had stumbled upon had come to Plastun Bay in boats to loot Chinese scows that sought shelter there in bad weather.

When he had all the information he wanted from us, Chen Pao said he had to make haste and promised to return to the Sanhopu in two or three days.

There was no need to hide from the Chinese any longer, and we headed forthwith for the nearest fanza, where we spent the night.

The Chinese said the Sanhopu, the extreme point of our journey along the sea-coast, was no more than a day's march away. We wanted to reach it before dark, and set out early the next morning. From there we intended to make for the Sikhota-alin and then march on to the Iman.

At the Sanhopu we decided to have a good rest and re-equip ourselves for the winter march.

With the cold season close at hand the question of horse fodder loomed large, and I decided to send the pack-animals with part of our group back to Olga Bay. Only six of the men and myself were to make the winter march across the Sikhota-alin.

In the evening Chen Pao arrived with his men. The khunkhutsi, he told us, had gone out to sea in a scow after Dersu's encounter with them, and were probably sailing due south.

The following three days—September 28-30—I was busy plotting routes, making entries in my diary, and writing letters. The Cossacks bagged a red deer and were drying its meat. They were also seeing to our winter footwear. I did not want to interfere with their work and made brief trips to the countryside all on my own.

The Sanhopu is made up of two rivers of equal size—the Sitsi (Chinese for "western tributary") and Tungtsi ("eastern tributary"). I was advised to map our route along the latter. So I decided to explore the Sitsi while there was still time.

On October 1 Dersu and I set out from "headquarters" with our knapsacks.

A large cliff, Talahsia, rises to the left of the point where the Sitsi and Tungtsi join. Local people say an old Chinese one day found a large ginseng plant near it; when he brought its root back to his fanza an earthquake occurred, and at night men were said to have heard the cliff groaning.

The Chinese assert that along the coast the Sanhopu is the northernmost ginseng border. The plant, they say, has never been found anywhere north of the river.

The valley in the lower reaches of the Sitsi is much like a chain of synclines cradled in a circle of mountains. The magnificent forests hereabouts abounded in cedar-trees. Along the river-banks the timber was felled by a lumber concern, but no more than a quarter of it was floated down-river. The bulk was abandoned on the spot. In falling, the forest giants tore down a good many other trees. Generally speaking, there was more rotten, dry wood than living timber. It was hard travelling through woodland of that kind. At one time we tried to turn off the path, but after a few paces we came to a tangle of fallen timber and barely managed to scramble out of it. The lumberjacks had ravaged an area of about six sq. miles.

The path ran through the heart of the forest. Considerable toil and a great many saws and axes had been required to lay it.

As human footprints became scarcer, those of animals increased in number.

Dersu strode along in silence and looked at all things with an indifferent eye. I took great delight in the scenery, however, and marvelled how he could tell by the way a twig was snapped in which direction someone had passed, and when, and what he wore on his feet, etc. Whenever I failed to grasp his reasoning, or doubted his deductions, he would say:

"You travelled so much. Why you don't understand?"

What puzzled me was plain and simple to him. He saw tell-tale signs where I saw nothing, much as I tried. He could easily tell, for instance, where a doe had passed with its yearling, that they had nibbled the leaves of a spirea shrub, and had then loped off, taking fright.

He was not making a show of his woodsmanship. We knew each other too well for that. With him it was mere force of habit. His eye was trained to miss nothing, for if it did, he would long since have starved to death. He chuckled each time I missed something, shook his head, and said:

"Hm! Like a baby. See nothing, savvy nothing. Live in town. Want to eat—go buy. Live alone in mountains—soon die."

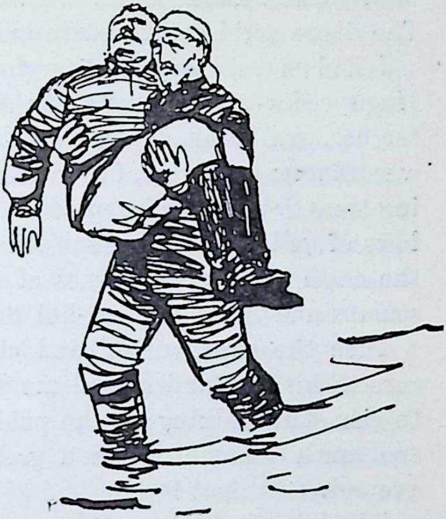
He was right. Peril stalks the lone taiga traveller, and only he who can read the signs can emerge unscathed from the fray.

I stepped on a thorny shrub. A sharp thorn pierced the sole of my boot and buried itself in my foot. I pulled off the boot and tried to draw it out. But apparently it broke. Its tip remained in the wound and next day I was in great pain. Dersu had a look at it, but its edges had pursed up. That day I could still walk, but at night the pain increased. I did not sleep a wink. Towards morning a large swelling had developed. But our provisions were running short and we had to keep going. There was no more bread. All we had was what we could shoot in the woods. At the bivouac we had bandages and medicines. Bad weather could hold us up in the taiga, and there was no telling how long I should take to get well once I lay down. I just had to keep going, in spite of the harrowing pain. Dersu carried my rifle and knapsack, supporting me down the slopes and easing my sufferings as best he could. I put all my weight on the right foot and dragged the left.

It was with great pain and difficulty that we marched a mere five miles that day. Fifteen more separated us from our encampment. At night my pain was agonizing. The swelling spread to the entire foot. I doubted whether I could still manage it to the nearest fanza. The same doubt probably assailed Dersu. He kept looking up at the sky, as if taking stock of the weather. But his fears were of a different sort. A kind of haze hung in the sky. With time it grew denser. The new moon was not bright, as usual, but wan and reddish. At times it vanished altogether. And in the end a glow became visible beyond the mountains.

"Plenty big smoke," my companion mumbled.

We were up at the crack of dawn. I could not sleep, anyhow, and it was better to march on as long as there was still a chance. That day will always remain in my memory. Every few paces I fell to the ground. I had ripped the boot to fit the swollen foot. Soon we came to a



forest strewn with dead-wood. Everything about us was shrouded in smoke. At fifty paces we could not even see the trees.

Dersu kept urging me on.

"I am terribly afraid," he kept saying. "This is not a grass fire—a proper forest fire. Must hurry."

I gritted my teeth and hobbled on. On the upgrade I crawled on all fours. Each root, fir-cone, pebble or twig made me wince with pain and roll on the ground.

Progress was increasingly difficult in the smoke. We spluttered and coughed. I thought we should never get out of the maze of fallen timber, which, thoroughly dried by sun and wind, was now a solid mass of fire.

A big blaze creates whirlwinds. The Gold's trained ear heard the noise of one, and our only salvation was to cross the river. But to ford the Talabsia one had to be firm on one's feet. For me it was an unthinkable venture. Suddenly, without a word, Dersu took me up in his arms and carried me across at a double. There was a wide strip of pebbles at this point. Then he went back for the rifles. A cloud of smoke enveloped the opposite bank at that instant and I saw nothing more. When I opened my eyes again Dersu was at my side, reclining on a rock. We were both tucked under a wet tent. Sparks danced overhead. The dense acrid smoke made breathing difficult.

I had never seen another forest fire as big as this. Huge cedar-trees, invested in flames, blazed like giant torches. An ocean of fire swept the ground. Everything was aflame: dry grass, fallen leaves, and dead-wood. Living trees groaned and exploded from the heat. Large billows of yellow smoke rose to the sky. The fire raced along the earth in waves, tongues of flame dancing round the stumps and licking at red-hot boulders.

Then the wind turned and cleared the smoke. Dersu rose to his feet and roused me as well. I made an effort to rise, but walking on the pebbles along the bank was too much for me. With a groan I sank back to the ground.

I had been putting all my weight on the heel and it was raw. The right leg ached in the knee. I could not make another step. Dersu pitched the tent, gathered fire-wood, and told me he would go to the Chinese and get a horse for me. That was our only hope of getting out of the taiga.

I was left all alone. Across the river the fire still raged. Clouds of sparks rose to the sky together with the smoke. The blaze was spreading. Some trees burned faster than others. I saw a wild pig crossing the river. A sapsucker darted crazily from tree to tree, and a cedar-bird chirped without let-up. My groans echoed it.

At last it grew dark. Obviously, Dersu would not return that day. The swelling on my foot had increased. I took off the boot and examined it. It was ripe, but the skin, hardened on the march, would not burst. I whetted my pocket-knife on a stone, added wood to the fire, and when it was burning merrily, I incised the swelling. Dark rings swam before my eyes from the excruciating pain. There was black blood and a thick mass of matter. I crawled painfully to the edge of the river, tore off the sleeve of my shirt and washed the wound. Then I bandaged it and returned to the fire. In about an hour I felt relief. The pain was less sharp.

A glow in the sky indicated the path of the fire. Lights glimmered in many places from the smouldering deadwood. I sat in my tent, stroking the bad foot with my hand. The warmth of the fire lulled me to sleep. When I awoke I saw Dersu and a Chinese. They had covered me with a blanket. A kettle was singing over the fire. A few paces away stood a saddled horse. The pain in my foot had subsided. The swelling had diminished. I washed the wound with hot water, drank some tea with Chinese bread, and began to dress. Dersu and the Chinese helped me into the saddle, and we set out.

The forest fire had moved far away, but smoke still hung in the air.

I was confined to my quarters until my foot was well again. In three days I could hobble about, and in a week was as good as new.

Chen Pao visited me on several occasions. He was very popular among the Chinese. Whatever he said was passed on from mouth to mouth. His orders were executed readily and promptly. Many came to him for advice, and I believe there was no problem too complicated for him.

Dersu spent the days with the natives. He found someone he knew back in his youth on the Ulaho River. In the settlement he quickly made friends with everyone and was a welcome visitor in all the fanzas.

Chen Pao came to say good-bye a few days before we left. He had to go on an urgent errand and left behind two Chinese, who were to guide me to the Sikhota-alin and were then to return by another route and report to him what they saw on the way.

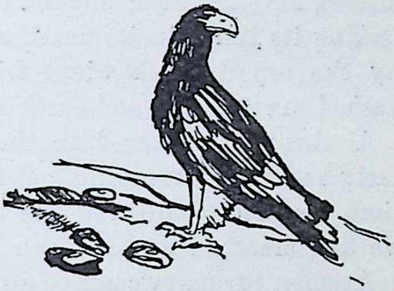
## 17. WINTER MARCH

We set out on October 18. In seeing us off the natives accompanied us from fanza to fanza, asking us inside each. Dersu was simply showered with farewells. The women and children waved to him, and he waved back. Detained thus at every hut, we finally reached the last of the dwellings. Frankly speaking, I heaved a sigh of relief.

The next day rain made us call an early halt. The evening was still far away, and Dersu and I went off to look round. There is something depressingly melancholy about a forest of a rainy autumn day. Mantled in cold fog, the naked tree-trunks, yellow grass, fallen leaves and wrinkled dark fern speak of the waning year and the approaching winter.

Suddenly a strange noise attracted us to the river-bank. A fascinating sight opened to view. The waters were literally teeming with salmon. Thousands of them swarmed in the backwaters and creeks. They were battered and beaten beyond recognition. Their fins were smashed, the bodies a mass of wounds. A great many were already dead, forming veritable dams in places, but some still had the strength to move. These were striving to make their way upriver, as though expecting to find relief there from their suffering.

Nature made wise provisions to dispose of them. Bears, wild pigs, foxes, badgers, raccoons, crows, magpies, etc., had come out in force. The birds showed a preference for dead fish, and the quadrupeds sought to catch living salmon. They had trampled down the ground all along the bank. We saw a bear. It was sitting on its haunches in a pebblestone shallow, clawing at the fish with its forepaws.



The brown bear and its kinsman, the Kamchatka bear, eat the salmon's head and discard the body. The white-breasted bear, meanwhile, eats the body, and discards the head.

Farther up the bank we encountered two wild pigs. They only ate the tails of the fish. A fox darted out of a thicket some distance away, snatched up a salmon and dragged it off into the shrubbery, too cautious to eat it on the spot.

Birds were in the majority. The eagles perched on the bank and pecked lazily, with an air of unhurried superiority, at whatever the bears left behind. The crows hopped from place to place, showing a decided partiality for fish that had already begun to decompose. The magpies darted about among the bushes, quarrelling with the other birds and screaming garrulously.

In places the creeks were frozen over. The fish entrapped by the ice would have to stay where it was all the winter. When the spring sun would again shed warm rays upon the earth, it would be carried down to the sea with the ice and become the booty of marine animals.

"One man eats another," Dersu mused aloud. "Fish eat somebody, wild pigs eat the fish, and now we eat a wild pig."

With this he took aim and fired at one of the boars. The mortally wounded animal started up with a roar, headed for the forest, but bit the earth short of its goal, jerking its limbs in its death agony. The birds, alarmed by the report, took wing, frightening the fish, which dashed madly back and forth along the creek.

At dusk we returned to the bivouac. We turned in early and rose next morning at the crack of dawn. By the time the first rays of the sun gilded the mountain tops we had marched no less than three miles.

At noon our party came to a small hunting lodge at the juncture of three mountain streams. Our path lay up the second of the three. The weather was fine. We marched in our summer shirts, and not until after dark did it grow chilly. I was delighted with the warm day, but Dersu held a different view.

"Look, captain," he kept saying, "birds hurry to eat. They understand that bad weather is soon to come."

The barometer stood high. I teased the Gold about it, but he replied stolidly:

"The bird is the first to know. Then I know."

It was some six miles to the pass over the Sikhota-alin. Our knapsacks were uncomfortably heavy, but we marched on cheerfully and made very few halts. At about four in the afternoon we came to the Sikhota-alin and now only had to scale its crest.

I had a good mind to get on with our ascent, but Dersu tugged at my sleeve:

"Better wait, captain," he said. "Make camp."

He explained that the birds, which had been hurriedly feeding in the morning, had vanished. The forest was indeed silent, whereas there was usually a great display of life before sundown. The birds had taken cover somewhere.

Dersu instructed us to drive in the tent pegs as deep into the ground as we could and, above all, to stock up fire-wood. He said we would need more than just a night's supply. I argued no longer and lent a hand gathering wood. In about two hours it grew dark. The men returned with what seemed to be a sufficient supply of fire-wood, but the Gold insisted on more. I heard him say to our two Chinese:

"They don't understand. Better we work ourselves."

The three of them kept at the task, and I sent two Cossacks to help them. It was only after dark that we ceased work.

The moon rose.The night was clear and calm. Streaks of moonlight crept deep into the dark forest and laid themselves out along the dry grass in long stripes. It was quiet on earth, and in the sky, and all about us, and nothing spoke of the impending storm. We sipped hot tea round the campfire and wisecracked about the Gold's alarm.

"You missed the mark this time," the Cossacks kept telling him.

Dersu made no reply, working diligently at his tent. He had pitched it under a jutting rock, hauled up a large stump and boulders, and stuffed moss between the stump and the stones. Then he covered them with his tarpaulin, pegged it down firmly to the ground, and laid a fire. His shelter looked inviting and cosy, and I instantly joined him there with my things.

Time went by. Yet the calm prevailed. I was beginning to lose faith in Dersu's forecast, but suddenly a dull spot near the moon with a parti-coloured rim dispelled my doubts. The disc of the moon lost lustre gradually, its outlines grew indistinct and dim. A haze was rapidly shrouding the sky, but where it came from and where it was heading was impossible to tell.

I thought it would all amount to nothing more than a quick shower, and this consoling thought lulled me to sleep. How long I slept I cannot say. I awoke with Murzin shaking me vigorously.

"Snowing," he reported.

I threw off my blanket. It was dark. The moon had vanished. Snow was fluttering down from the skies. The fire was burning brightly and lit up the tents, the sleeping men, and our stacks of fire-wood. I roused Dersu. He awakened with a start, looked about him with sleep-laden eyes, glanced up at the sky and got busy with his pipe.

"Very quiet," he said. "Many days no wind. Now we get big snow-storm."

It was, indeed, calm, but the silence that reigned around us was ominous. Soon the snowfall increased. The flakes were falling to the ground with a kind of faint rustle. The rest of the men woke up as well and began putting away their things.

Suddenly the snow began to whirl.

"Starting," said Dersu.

And as if in reply to his words a rumbling rolled over the mountains, a gust of wind swept by unexpectedly, followed by a second, a third, a fifth, a tenth, each longer than the one before. The fire flared up. Good thing our tents were solidly pitched, or the wind would have torn them down.

I cast a glance at Dersu. He was puffing away calmly at his pipe and gazing indifferently at the flames. He had probably seen so many blizzards in his time that one more left him unruffled and unalarmed. He seemed to read my thoughts, and said:

"We have plenty of fire-wood. The tents are pretty strong. Never mind."

In an hour it grew light. All hell broke loose about us. The wind raged with terrifying fury. The branches of trees snapped and were carried off into space like feathers. Giant old cedar-trees swayed from side to side as though they were no thicker than a finger. The hills, sky and earth were shrouded from view. Everything reeled in a snowy whirl. At times we would get a faint glimpse of the trees through a dense curtain of snow, and then a new gust of wind would blot out the picture.

We snuggled up to each other in our tents in speechless awe. Meanwhile, the storm gathered strength by midday. Our shelters, though protected by the cliffs, were insecure. It was hot and smoky in our tents when the wind blew our way, and bitterly cold when it turned in the opposite direction.

We did not venture to the river-bank for water, and stuffed snow, which was plentiful, into our tea-kettles. At dusk the storm reached its zenith, and as it grew darker its effect became ever more terrifying. Few of us slept that night. It was all we could do to keep warm.

On the twenty-first the snow-storm held us up. The gale blew from the north-east, gaining in intensity. We could see no farther than a few yards.

We kept the fire going with the greatest difficulty. Large snow-drifts piled up near our tents. The snow whirls achieved uncommon strength after midday, raising clouds of snow from the ground and scattering them over the forest. Each whirl of this kind left a trail of uprooted trees.

In the afternoon the sky cleared up somewhat, but the temperature continued to fall. The sun, an indistinct fleck, peeped out from behind a thick curtain of clouds.

Our supply of fire-wood was running low. It had to be replenished. We ran at a double to gather up all the dead-wood near our encampment, labouring on until Dersu gave the order to stop. We did not need a second telling and rushed off to the tents to warm our hands by the fire. Another uncomfortable night descended.

In the morning the weather was scarcely better. The wind was still sharp, and we decided to try crossing the Sikhota-alin in the hope that there would be less of it on the western slope. Dersu's was the deciding vote.

"I think it will soon stop," he said and gathered up his things.

It did not take us long to break camp. Within about twenty minutes we were on our way, knapsacks on our backs, clambering uphill.

It was a steep climb. The snow lay over three feet deep in places. On reaching the crest we paused for breath. The barometer indicated that the pass was 3,000 feet above sea level. We christened it "Pass of Patience."

A gruesome picture opened to our eyes from the crest of the Sikhota-alin. The hurricane had uprooted entire strips of forest. We had to skirt these strips. As I said before, in rocky country trees spread their roots along the surface. They are only slightly covered with moss. Some had fallen victim to the storm. Others still swayed from side to side, loosening up their roots. Black crevices kept opening and closing amidst the white mantle of snow. One of my men got it into his head to swing on a root. A gust of wind swept the countryside at that moment, the tree tottered, and the Cossack escaped by the skin of his teeth as the forest giant tumbled to earth with an unholy din, showering us with lumps of frozen earth.

## 18. TO THE IMAN

The descent of the western slope was gentle enough, but the mountain-side was densely wooded and strewn with boulders. We found a brook in the foot-hills, which brought us to a river. Every footprint, however tiny, was clearly visible in the snow. There were the tracks of elks, musk deer, sables, and polecats. Dersu walked ahead of me and examined the imprints. Suddenly he stopped, looked round, and muttered:

"What did she fear?"

"Who d'you mean?" I asked.

"Musk-deer," he replied.

I looked at the tracks but saw nothing out of the ordinary: just closely-set small imprints.

Dersu possessed astounding insight when reading tracks. A slight irregularity was enough to tell him the animal was alarmed.

I wanted to know why he thought the musk-deer was frightened, and his reply, as usual, was plain and simple. The deer had walked with an even gait until it stopped, after which it advanced with greater caution than before. Then it had jumped aside and bounded away. All this was plainly written in the tracks in the snow. I was on the verge of going on, but Dersu held me back.

"Wait, captain," he said, "must see what man frightened the deer."

A minute later he announced that the deer had been frightened by a sable. He showed me sable tracks in the snow upon the trunk of a large fallen tree. The animal had stalked the deer, hiding behind a branch, and had then jumped upon its prey. Dersu found the spot where the deer rolled in the snow. Blood-stains showed that the sable had bitten through its skin near the back of its head. Then the musk-deer had shaken off its adversary and had bounded away with the sable on its heels. But the latter soon gave up the chase and clambered up a tree.

Surely, if I were to have Dersu at my side for some time, and if only he were more communicative, I should learn to read tracks better than most hunters.

Dersu always saw much more than he cared to speak about. He had no wish to stop every minute and explain what he thought were mere trifles. It was only in exceptional cases, when his eye caught something particularly interesting, that he spoke aloud to himself about it.

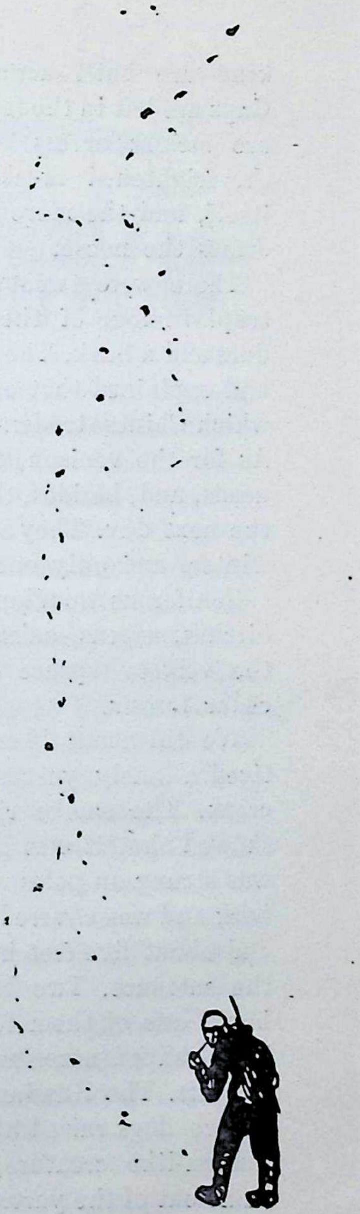
Some fifteen miles from the Sikhota-alin the river we followed merged with another, flowing from the north. This was where the Kulumba began, which was to bring us to the Iman. There was ice along the banks of the river and we jumped across without much difficulty.

A little bird whose playful exuberance earned it the name of "merry-maker" among our Cossacks, attracted our attention some distance away. It was the water ouzel, which is no larger than a thrush, and always keeps close to water. I approached to within a few paces of it, stopped, and watched it. It was on the alert, turned its head in my direction, and screamed, its little tail wagging in time with the calls. Then it suddenly dived into the stream. Natives say it has the peculiar habit of walking on the bottom of the river, heedless of the current. When it reappeared on the surface and saw us, it took wing with loud protests and perched upon another puddle of open water, and then upon a third. I followed it and then discovered that it had taken me far off our course.

The river froze solidly overnight and we could now continue our journey over the ice. That made progress much easier. The strong wind swept away the snow. The coat of ice thickened with each passing day. True, there were still many unfrozen patches of water, and a dense fog was rising from them.

Some three miles farther up the river we came upon a pair of Korean fanzas. Their owners—two old and two young Koreans—were hunters and trappers. Their miniature huts were new and tidy. I took a fancy to them and called a day's halt.

After midday two of the Koreans made ready to go and inspect their musk-deer traps, and I joined them. The traps were only some 500 yards away—a fence four feet high, made from fallen timber and reinforced with poles driven deep into the ground. Structures of this



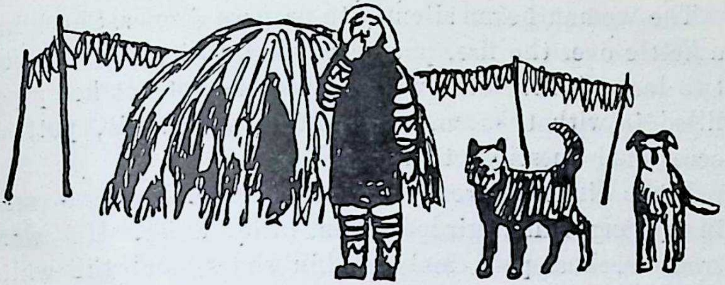
kind are built across deer paths in the mountains. Gaps are left in the fencing and ropes with running nooses are strung across the passages. Caught in the noose the frightened musk-deer makes violent efforts to free itself, and the more it exerts its strength, the tighter it draws the noose.

There were twenty-two such nooses in the Koreans' trap. In four of them we found dead animals—three does and a buck. The trappers threw the does to the crows, and explained that only bucks yielded the valuable musk, which Chinese traders bought from them at a ruble a piece. As for the venison, the buck was quite enough for their needs, and, besides, they would bag just as many animals the next day. They said they killed up to 125 deer each winter, and only one in four was a buck.

Coniferous woodland was giving way to poplars, elms, birches, aspens, oaks, maples, etc. Up in the mountains the velvety spruce and fir gave place to magnificent cedar forests.

We did about 10 miles that day. At dusk the men noticed a lonely yurt some distance away at the edge of a creek. The smoke rising from an opening in its roof showed that it was inhabited. A prodigal supply of fish was strung on poles, drying. The yurt was made of cedar bark and was covered with dry grass; it was ten feet long and about five feet high. A birch-bark flap curtained off the entrance. Two boats were lying bottoms up on the bank, one of them fairly large, with a peculiar kind of ladle-shaped nose, and the other light and pointed fore and aft. The Russians call it an *omorochka*.

Two dogs raised a din as we approached. A strange, human-like creature, which I took for a boy at first, came out of the yurt. A ring in its nose, however, showed



it to be a woman. She was no taller than a twelve-year-old girl, and was dressed in a knee-long leather shirt, deerskin trousers, colourfully embroidered knee-pads, similarly embroidered native shoes and gaudy armlets. A white shawl covered her head.

The woman looked at us in surprise, and suddenly alarm was reflected in her face. Decent Russians, she must have thought, would never have strayed into this wilderness. They must be "choldons ,"* she thought, and darted back into the yurt. To dissipate her suspicions Dersu addressed her in the native tongue and introduced me as the chief of the expedition. She lost fear then. But native custom did not allow a woman to make a noisy display of curiosity, and she checked herself, watching us furtively.

The yurt, small from the outside, was even smaller inside. You could only sit or lie in it. I gave orders for the Cossacks to pitch our tents.

The transition from the Udehei natives on the sea-coast, who associated with Chinese and picked up many of their customs, to the inland Udeheis, who retained so much of their primitive traits, was very sudden.

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* *Choldons*—the Udehei name for robbers.—*Tr.*

The woman began silently to prepare dinner. She hung a kettle over the fire, poured water into it, and dropped two large fish into the water. Then she got out her pipe, filled it with tobacco, and puffed away at it, putting occasional questions to Dersu.

When dinner was ready the master came. He was dressed in a long shirt, girded about the waist. He wore trousers, knee-pads and fishskin shoes, and the white shawl over his head was topped with a small goatskin cap crowned with a squirrel's tail. The savage looked much like a redskin, what with his red, sunburnt face, his colourful costume, the squirrel's tail, the rings on his fingers and bracelets on his arms. The impression grew on us as he sat down by the fire, taking little notice of us, and silently puffed at his pipe.

Custom demanded that the visitors should be the first to break the silence. Dersu was aware of that and asked him about the way and the depth of the fallen snow. That set off the conversation. On learning who we were, the Udehei said he knew we were to go down the Iman, and that we were being expected there. He had heard it from his kinsmen down-river. This news amazed me.

In the evening his wife inspected our clothing, mended it, and gave us new footwear to replace the old. Our host gave me a bearskin to sleep on, and, covered with my blanket, I soon fell asleep.

I woke up at night from a bitter cold. Sticking my head out from under the blanket, I discovered that there was no fire in the yurt. Only a few embers still flickered in the fire-place. The opening in the roof offered a view of the dark star-studded sky. A lusty snoring came from the other end of the yurt. Going to bed, the Udeheis apparently extinguished the flames for fear of a fire. I tried wrapping myself up in the blanket, but nothing helped. It was piercing cold. I got up, struck a match and looked at the thermometer. It was 17°C below zero. Then I took part of my birch-bark bedding and put it in the fire, fanning the smouldering embers. A minute later there was a merry blaze. I dressed and left the yurt. My men were all asleep in the tent, a fire burning at their side. I warmed myself by the fire and was about to return to the yurt when I suddenly saw the light of another fire near the river. That was where I found Dersu. The river had washed a hollow in the bank, and he had made a grass bed for himself in the cave-like depression. A fire kept him warm. Dersu held his pipe between his teeth, and his rifle lay at his side. I roused him. He started up and, thinking that he had overslept, instantly began gathering up his things. But on learning what it was all about, he gave his place up to me and lay down at my side. In a few minutes I was warm and slept much sounder than in the yurt on the bearskin.

When I woke up the others were all up and about. The Cossacks were cooking venison. The Udehei announced that he would accompany us to Sidatung.

We did not make much headway that day. Though our food supplies diminished and the knapsacks grew lighter, it became ever more difficult to carry them. The straps cut into the shoulders, and I noticed that this was the case with all our group.

The cold wind made the snow crisp and dry, and this impeded our progress. It was particularly hard going uphill. We were sorely in need of a rest.

We found an empty yurt by the river. The Cossacks made themselves at home in it, while the Chinese decided to sleep outside by the fire. Dersu meant at first to join the latter, but when he saw that they gathered their fire-wood indiscriminately, he made his bed elsewhere.

"They don't understand," he said. "I don't want my shirt to burn. Must get good fire-wood."

The empty yurt apparently often served as a shelter to hunters. All the dry wood round it had long since been cut and burned. But that did not discourage Dersu. He went deeper into the forest and brought back an ash-tree from afar. He carried fire-wood until it was dark, and I helped him. We slept excellently all night, without fear for the tent and our clothing.

The crimson glow in the evening and the black haze on the horizon before dawn were sure signs of an oncoming frost. It was bitterly cold in the morning. The sun rose dull and deformed. It gave off light, but no warmth. Bright rays spread from its disk upwards and down, and there were vivid luminescent spots on both sides of it, which polar peoples call the "sun's ears."

The Udehei knew these parts well. He found paths that shortened our journey, and near the mouth of the Kulumba he turned into a forest trail which brought us to the Iman in something short of an hour.

The river was frozen only along the banks. On the opposite side of it we saw a group of miniature people, who turned out to be Udehei children. A short distance away stood a yurt and a barn built on piles.

Dersu shouted to the children to row a boat over to our bank. The boys looked with fright in our direction and ran off. Soon a man appeared from the yurt with a rifle in his hands. He exchanged a few words with Dersu and then rowed across to us.

An Udehei boat is a long, light, flat-bottomed vessel which a single man can easily pull ashore. As we climbed into the boat it rocked dangerously, and I clutched at its sides involuntarily. But as soon as we settled ourselves in it and pulled away from the bank I convinced myself that it was very stable. Standing erect, the Udehei guided it with a long pole. He pushed it with vigorous jolts against the strong current, which drove the boat gradually towards the opposite bank.

At last we landed on the ice near the yurt, and were met by a woman and three children. The latter hid timidly behind their mother. The woman let us into the yurt, and seated herself by the fire, and lit a pipe. The children remained outdoors, stowing the fish away in the barn. There were numerous cracks in the walls of the yurt, and the wind whistled freely inside the structure. A fire burned in the middle of it, and the children came running in from time to time to warm their frozen hands. I was surprised to see how lightly they were dressed: chests open, and hands bare, and without headgear. They worked away at their task, and appeared oblivious of the frost. Whenever one of them stayed too long by the fire, their father ordered him back into the cold.

"He's frozen," I said to Dersu, and asked him to pass my words on to the Udehei.

"Let him get accustomed to it," the latter replied. "Or he'll die of hunger."

I could not help agreeing with him.

The Udeheis told us the way and we soon came to a Chinese hunters' settlement. Five Udehei families lived in three yurts on the opposite bank of the Iman. I stayed with the latter.

On October 31 it grew markedly colder. Ice floated down-river. But in spite of it the Udeheis advised us to travel by boat and offered us their services.

## 19. DESPERATE STRAITS

On November 1 we made an early start down the Iman.

The Udeheis learn to navigate mountain streams in early childhood. It is an art of its kind, for the navigator must see far ahead, know where to check the boat, where to turn its nose against the current, and where, conversely, to gather all possible speed and slip by a dangerous spot. A trifling oversight leads to disaster; the boat, snatched up by the swift stream, is smashed against the rocks. And when it comes to rapids, where the water is very unruly, the boat is tossed from side to side and it is even more difficult to keep balance.

Our trip down-river was made even more hazardous by the ice that encroached on the fairway. We had to pick our way past the ice blocks, particularly where the rapids lay on a river curve. Furthermore, as the ice spread farther from the banks, the current in midriver became swifter.

Like all mountain streams the Iman abounded in rapids. One of them was particularly dangerous. We heard its noise from afar, and the dip in the river-bottom was discernible even to the naked eye. A cliff overhung it. Foaming water swirled under the rock, which was frozen over with spray.

The Udeheis reined in the boat and held counsel. Then they turned the craft with its side to the current, and guided it slowly down-river. When a strong undercurrent of water hurled the boat towards the cliff they pushed it intrepidly in a new direction. I could see by the expression in the eyes of the Udeheis that we were in grave danger. Dersu was the coolest of all.

"Never mind, captain," he said. "Udehei is like fish. He is good boatman."

Progress was becoming increasingly difficult. There was more and more ice. It took up most of the fairway. The Udeheis manoeuvred skilfully among the ice blocks, pushing them away with their poles. At a sharp bend an uncommonly large accumulation of ice rose in our way. Only a narrow passage remained ice-free in the middle of the river. Our guides were not sure whether or not it was a through passage. They stopped the boat and asked me if they should risk going farther. I had had enough of marching with the heavy knapsack, and told them to try our luck. Dersu objected, but I was confident that we should have the chance of scrambling ashore if anything went wrong, and we started out. After some 45 yards we realized that the passage was a blind alley. The river was solidly frozen over. The piled-up ice blocks spelt disaster to our heavily-laden craft. Pressed by the current against the ice, it would quickly ship water. We had to back out of the passage in double quick time. But that was not as easy as it looked. The passage was too narrow to turn the boat. It had to be propelled stern foremost against the current. As luck would have it, we were in the middle of the fairway and our poles barely touched bottom. We had backed half way up the passage with a great deal of effort when a sudden yell made me turn. A large block of ice was racing head on in our direction and threatened to seal our exit before we reached it. The Udeheis redoubled their efforts, but to no avail. The ice block struck with much noise against one edge of the passage, and then against the other. The collision set other ice blocks into motion, and the sides of the pass began to close in on us.

"The ice will crush us!" Dersu shouted at the top of his voice. "Must get out quick."

He jumped on the floating ice and ran towards the bank, dragging the boat's rope behind him. Several times he fell into the water, but scrambled out safely each time. Luckily, the bank was near. The Cossacks followed suit. Two of them reached shore safely, but Murzin slipped into the water. He tried to clamber on to an ice block, but it tipped over. The more he struggled, the blacker things looked for him. In another minute he would have gone under. Dersu came running to his aid. One moment it seemed he would also drown. Meanwhile, the Udeheis and I were making our way from ice block to ice block, holding on to the sides of the boat, pulling it along with us. Its nose soon came within the reach of Dersu and Murzin, and that saved them. Then the boat veered across the river and, snatched up by the current, was being borne off together with the ice. We threw our knapsacks ashore and scrambled out ourselves. A few minutes later we saw our craft pressed against the cliff. It resisted the ice for some time, trembling like a living thing, then gave way all at once and folded up. We heard it crunch, saw its wreck rise high out of the water, and then vanish.

The first thing we did on coming ashore was to build a fire. We had to dry ourselves. Someone suggested making tea, and we began looking for the knapsack with the provisions. It was missing, and so was one of the rifles.

In the way of food we now had to be content with what each had in his pockets. The Udeheis said we should come to a fanza before nightfall; they hoped to find frozen fish in its barn.

We reached the hut at dusk. But it was empty, save for two dried fish. That was all we had for dinner.

There is a sharp bend where the Iman merges with the Armu, its major tributary. The latter is about 250 feet wide in its lower reaches, and from seven to ten feet deep. The velocity of its current is six miles per hour.

We sighted the Hutado River at noon on November 2, following its bank upstream to a pass across the mountain range skirted by the Iman.

Two brooks lay in our path, one leading north, and the other west. We should have followed the latter, but I picked the wrong one. After crossing the pass we camped on a scrap of even ground and began looking for fire-wood.

Next day we ate up our last fish and resumed our journey with practically empty knapsacks. From now on we had to depend on our rifles for our next meal. Dersu was sent ahead and we followed some three hundred paces in the rear, so as not to frighten away the game.

We waited eagerly for the report of Dersu's rifle, but in vain. After midday the valley widened, and we found a small, scarcely visible footpath. It led northwards, crossing a stretch of marshland.

We were hungry. All conversation died down. No one was in the mood for empty chatter. I glimpsed Dersu away in front, shuffling from spot to spot, bending down and picking something off the ground. I called to him and he waved in response.

"What have you found?" a Cossack asked him.

"Bear eat fish," he replied, "and left the heads."

We found a great number of fish heads strewn about in the snow. The bears had obviously feasted here after the recent snowfall.

"Beggars must be no choosers," says the proverb. We had to make the best of the bears' leavings. We tackled them with vim, and in no more than a quarter of an hour all our pockets were stuffed with fish heads. Engrossed in our occupation we scarcely noticed how the little valley brought us to the bank of a fairly large river. It was the Sinantsa. The Udeheis said we should reach the Iman by noon next day.

We made camp on the other bank in a dense coniferous forest. The fish heads made an excellent repast. Some of them were meaty, and a real find. We divided them among ourselves in equal portions and they provided a tasty, if not a particularly filling, dinner.

At night the temperature fell steeply, but since there was no shortage of fire-wood we slept through it soundly.

At dawn on November 4 we rose hungry.

Progress through the knee-deep snow was difficult. In an hour we did no more than a couple of miles.

Hard as we looked for it, we found no game, and our quest for more fish heads also proved futile. One of the Cossacks spotted a musk-deer and took a shot at it, but missed.

Judging by the time of day we should be near the Iman, and I expected to see the mouth of the Sinantsa at every bend. But all we saw was woodland.

At dusk we came to a small bark lodge. I was highly gratified, but Dersu did not share my joy. He said the absence of things in it indicated that it served travellers merely as a night shelter, and that this meant the Iman was no less than a day's march away.

We all suffered from hunger. The Cossacks sat gloomily by the fire, sighed and scarcely spoke to each other. They turned in earlier than usual. Should we fail to bag some game the next day, or to reach the Iman, things would look grim. In summer people can go without food for several days, but in winter they are liable to freeze to death.

In the morning Dersu was the first to be up, and roused me. He was worried. We had to keep on the move as long as our legs would carry us. But as we started, I felt my strength was failing. The knapsack appeared twice as heavy as the day before and every 500 yards we stopped to rest. There was an urge to lie down—a bad sign. By noon we had made little progress. In this way, I felt, we should not reach the Iman that day. On the way we took several shots at small birds. The bag was three nuthatches and a woodpecker, but the scanty meal they made did not go far with five full-grown men.

In the meantime, the weather deteriorated. The sky was overcast. Gusts of wind raised the snow from the ground. Snow dust fluttered in the air and whirls of it rose over the river. In places the ice was swept clean, in others there were deep snow-drifts. We were all bitterly cold. Our clothing was badly worn and scarcely protected us from the frost.

A rocky mountain rose to the left, its steep precipices ranged all along the river. We found something of a cave and made a fire. Dersu hung a kettle over it and boiled some water. Then he fished a deerskin out of his knapsack, singed it over the fire and chopped it up into noodle-like strips. These he dropped into the kettle and kept the water at a boil for quite some time. Then he turned to us with the following words:

"All men must eat. We must cheat our stomachs. Must get a little strength. Then we must walk quickly. Cannot rest. When the sun goes down today we must come to the Iman."

None of us needed a second urging. We were all prepared to swallow anything. The leather, though thoroughly boiled, was still hard. We could scarcely chew it. But that did not deter us, and Dersu had to warn us against overeating.

In half an hour we were on our way. The leather we had just swallowed had not stilled our hunger, but it provided our digestive organs with something to do. Whenever anyone lagged behind Dersu turned on him with a stream of invectives.

The day waned, but we kept on our course. It seemed there was no end to the Sinantsa. Ever new stretches of it opened beyond each succeeding curve. We were on our last legs, staggering like drunk. If it had not been for Dersu, we should long since have made camp. At six the first signs of human life appeared—ski and sledge tracks, freshly cut tree-stumps, and stacks of chopped fire-wood.

"Iman is near," Dersu said triumphantly.

We heard dogs bark in the distance, and behind the next turn the lights of a Chinese settlement, Sian-shihetsa, glimmered in the dark.

Fifteen minutes later we were approaching the village. Never have I been so tired as on that day. We entered the first fanza and dropped on to the k'ang in our clothes. There was nothing we wanted to do, not even eat, or drink, or talk.

Our appearance naturally alarmed the Chinese, and particularly the master of the fanza. He furtively dispatched his labourers somewhere, and soon another Chinese came to the hut. Dressed better than the others, he behaved with undue familiarity and spoke in a shrill, commanding voice. He spoke fluent, faultless Russian, peppering his speech with occasional proverbs and sayings, urging us to move to his fanza. He gave his name as Li Tang-kui, son of Li Ching-fu, asserted that his fanza was the best in the settlement, and informed us the fanza we were in belonged to a pauper. Then he went outdoors and held a whispered conversation with the master of our hut. The latter approached me and requested us to remove to Li Tang-kui's. Nothing remained but to assent. Labourers came to help carry our things. Along the way Dersu tugged furtively at my sleeve and said:

"He is a very crafty man. I think he wants to cheat us in some way. I shall not sleep tonight."

My suspicions were also aroused. The Chinaman's fawning familiarity was not to my taste.

At night I was wakened by Dersu. He motioned to me to be quiet and whispered that Li Tang-kui had offered him money and had asked him to persuade me to by-pass the Udehei yurts on the Hwakungpoo. The Chinese said he would provide us with guides and porters. Dersu had said the matter was out of his hands. After that he, Dersu, had pretended to go back to sleep. Li Tang-kui had waited to make sure Dersu was sleeping, and had then left the hut and ridden off on horseback.

"We must go to Hwakungpoo tomorrow," Dersu urged, "I think something wrong there."

At that moment we heard the thud of horses' hoofs, fell back on the k'ang and pretended sleep. Li Tang-kui entered the hut, and after making sure we were sleeping, he undressed and lay down. Soon slumber overtook me and I was roused by some noise when the sun was high overhead. The Cossacks informed me that several Udeheis had come to the fanza. I dressed and went outdoors. There was rancour in the eyes of the natives as they looked at me.

After tea I said we would break camp and continue on our way. Li Tang-kui tried talking me into staying another day, and promised to slaughter a pig for dinner. But Dersu winked to me to refuse. Then Li Tang-kui began urging his guide upon us, but I declined again. All Li Tang-kui's cunning failed to deceive us.

The Iman Chinese were all well armed and prosperous. They made no effort to hide their hostility, and had just one answer to all our questions about the roads and the local population. It was "pu chi dao," meaning "I don't know," and some even said: "I know, but I won't tell you."

There were 85 Udeheis in the Hwakungpoo settlement. They all came out to meet us. But they were far from friendly and did not invite us into their yurts.

Their first question to me was why we had spent the night in Li Tang-kui's fanza. I told them why, and then asked why they were so unfriendly. The Udeheis said they had long been expecting me and had then suddenly learned that I had stopped with the Chinese.

We discovered that a veritable tragedy had befallen the settlement. Li Tang-kui was tsai-dung* of the Iman valley, exploited the natives and punished them cruelly if they failed to turn in a specified number of pelts at given periods. He had ruined many families, sold their children. Two of the Udeheis, Masenda and Somo, had finally gone to Khabarovsk to complain to the Governor-General. The latter had promised help and had said, incidentally, that I was to come to the Iman from the sea. He told them to approach me, and expected that I should easily settle the problem. The Udeheis returned and told their clansmen to await my arrival. Li Tang-kui learned of the trip made to Khabarovsk by Somo and Masenda. He had them beaten with sticks. One of them died during the beating, while the other, though he survived, remained a cripple for life. Themurdered man'sbrother, Gulunga, went to Khabarovsk. Li Tang-kui wanted to capture and freeze him to death in the river. But the Udeheis decided to defend their kinsman with arms in hand. A regular siege began, and for a fortnight the natives had been staying at home, did not go hunting, and suffered from lack of food. The news that I had come to Sian-shi-hetsa and had stopped at Li Tang-kui's, upset them greatly. I explained that I had known nothing of the Iman events and that on arriving at the Chinese settlement I was exhausted and hungry and had entered the first fanza I saw.

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* *Tsai-dung*—affluent person.—*Tr.*

In the evening the Udehei elders gathered in one of the yurts. They decided that I should report the situation on my return to Khabarovsk and plead for aid to the natives.

## 20. THE FINAL LEG

On November 8 we went on. The Udeheis turned out in force to bid us farewell. Dressed in their multicoloured garb, the squirrels' tails on their headgear, and their faces tanned a deep brown, they made a bizarre spectacle, somewhat naive though savage.

We walked in their midst, the elders by our side, and the young some distance away, engrossed in reading the tracks of otters, foxes and hares. At the farther end of the clearing the natives stopped. A grey-haired elder stepped out of the crowd. He handed me a lynx's claw and told me to put it in my pocket as a reminder of their request concerning Li Tang-kui. After that we parted. The Udeheis returned to their encampment, and we struck out for our goal.

In the summer taiga the traveller must keep a watchful eye on the path, lest he lose it. In winter, however, covered with a carpet of snow, it stands out distinctly among the shrubbery. That was a great help to my surveying.

We were badly in need of a rest. The Udeheis had told us there was a Chinese settlement, Kartun, some distance away. We meant to spend a day there to regain our strength and hire horses if any were available. But our hopes were dashed.

We came to Kartun before nightfall. The sun had sunk below the horizon. Its rays still played among the clouds and their reflection lit up the earth. We saw some Chinese fanzas near the river. They hid among the spruces, as though seeking cover from the eyes of wayfarers. We headed for them.

I have never seen more prosperous fanzas. They were strung out along the right bank of the river and looked like factories rather than dwellings.

In one of them, the Chinese met me with undisguised hostility. They had been informed of who we were and why the Udeheis were accompanying us. It is far from pleasant staying in a house whose masters are inhospitable. So I changed to another fanza. But there we received an even cooler welcome. The other fanzas would not even open their doors, no matter how much we knocked. The Cossacks cursed, Dersu cursed, and I cursed, but there was little more we could do. I did not want to spend the night near the inhospitable settlers and decided to march on until we should find a suitable camp site.

The pretty glow in the sky began to fade. Stars appeared. The Chinese fanzas remained far behind, but we went on and on. Suddenly Dersu stopped, raised his head and sniffed the air.

"Wait, captain," he said. "I smell smoke. Udeheis."

"How do you know?" one of the Cossacks asked him. "Perhaps it's a Chinese fanza."

"No," Dersu replied, "Udeheis. Chinese fanzas have big smokestacks, smoke rises high. In a yurt the smoke is low. The Udeheis are frying fish."

And he went on, all of us following closely. He would stop at times and sniff the air again. We walked fifty paces, then a hundred, two hundred, and yet there was no sight of the promised yurt. The men, footsore and weary, cracked jokes at Dersu's expense, and he grew annoyed.

"You sleep here, and I go to the yurt and eat fish," he replied.

I followed him, and the Cossacks followed in our wake. In some three minutes we arrived at the Udehei encampment. There were two yurts. In one of them I saw women frying fish. Dersu's sense of smell was obviously far more developed than ours. He had scented smoke and frying fish at a distance of at least 250 paces, if not more.

A few minutes later we were sitting by the fire, eating fish and washing it down with tea. I was so tired I could scarcely make the necessary notes in my diary. The Udeheis promised to take turns through the night to tend the fire, and instantly began chopping wood.

The night was bitterly cold and foggy. Frankly, I hoped in my heart of hearts that there would be a storm in the morning. We should at least have a chance to rest properly and catch up on our sleep. But the first rays of the sun dispersed the fog. The riverside bushes and trees were hoary with frost and looked like corals. On the smooth ice the frost settled in rosettes. The sunbeams played on them and left the impression that gems and diamonds had been scattered in profusion all along the river.

I knew the Cossacks were all itching to go home and made the necessary arrangements. One of the Udeheis volunteered to guide us.

Strangely enough, nearer the Ussuri the going became harder. Our knapsacks were almost empty but appeared heavier than when they were full earlier in our journey.

Our shoulders were chafed, and hurt at the slightest touch. The strain caused a headache, and we were ready to drop.

As we came nearer to the railway, people treated us with increasing suspicion. Our clothes were tattered, our boots worn, and the peasants thought we were tramps.

My men marched lazily and made frequent halts. At dusk we came to a farm-stead known, quaintly enough, as Parovozi. No one could tell me the origin of that name. The farm-stead was occupied by an Udehei elder, Sarl Kimunka, and his family. In 1901 he had accompanied an official of the Resettlement Agency along the Iman down to the Sikhota-alin. Kimunka knew from personal experience what hardships stalked the explorer of the Sikhota-alin, and we found the warmest of welcomes in his fanza, and a good dinner of millet gruel and dried fish to boot.

We rose late the next morning, breakfasted on fish, and pushed off. Sarl Kimunka showed us the way to some Koreans who had recently settled near Parovozi. In its lower reaches the Iman was ice-free and we had to cross it in a boat. But there was not a single man in all the fanzas. The women, meanwhile, gazed at us with frightened eyes and hid their children from us. I gave up the search and led my men to the riverside. The Udehei found a flat-bottomed boat concealed in the bushes, and took us across the river one by one.

At the foot of a solitary mountain on the left bank we saw four mud huts. This was a Russian settlement, Kotelnoye. The settlers had only just arrived from Russia and had not as yet built proper houses for themselves. We asked for shelter in one of the huts, whose occupants turned out to be a hospitable lot. They showered

us with questions, and in the end complained about their own fate.

Their peasant bread was a treat. All the settlers gathered in our hut at nightfall. They spoke of their new homes and sighed heavily. Obviously, it had gone hard with them. If it had not been for the salmon, they would have starved.

Milestones marked the road leading from Kotelnoye. The nearest one bore the figure 74. We lacked the cash to hire horses. I was intent on bringing my survey to a finish, and that entailed going on foot. Furthermore, our shabby clothes offered little protection from the cold, and to keep warm we had to keep moving.

We set out at dawn.

Soon after midday we came to Lukyanovka, a Korean village of 52 fanzas scattered over far-flung fields. We rested here, and went on. Dusk caught us on the march. We were all thoroughly fatigued, cold and hungry. I could no longer see the readings on my instruments, but the road was still clearly visible. So I had one of the Cossacks light matches at my signal, noting the readings by their light, jotting them down quickly, and then resuming our march. At long last we saw a flickering light.

"It's a village," someone shouted.

Dersu said: "At night fires always cheat."

Indeed, lights are visible at great distances in the dark. Sometimes they appear farther away than they really are, and sometimes deceptively near. We went on and on. It seemed the light was in retreat. I was ready to call a halt in the open when the elusive beacon suddenly appeared at a close distance. We saw a hut, then another and another. There were eight all told. It was the village of Verbovka. Many of the peasants were away, having gone to town in search of work. The frightened women took us for bandits and would not open the doors. We had to resort to the village elder's aid. He gave shelter in his house to Dersu and myself, and found quarters for the others in a neighbouring hut.

We had walked 22 miles that day and were tired; I could not fall asleep from over-fatigue and kept tossing from side to side in my bed.

Another 27 miles remained to the railway. After consulting my companions, I decided to cover this distance in one march. We started out in the dark. I carried on my surveying with the help of matches for about an hour.

As the sun rose we were already approaching Gogolevka.

It was a cold morning. White smoke rose in straight columns from the village chimneys. I meant to by-pass the huts, but one of the local people learned who we were and insisted that we come in and have tea with him. We did not have the heart to turn down his invitation. He was a fine chap, serving us milk, honey, and butter. I cannot recall his name, but I shall always be grateful to him for his warm welcome and hospitality. He gave us food to take with us, and even plied my men with tobacco and biscuits.

The bread and tea lent us added strength. After thanking our host we went on and soon came to the village of Zvenigorodka. It was 15 miles to the railway, but that was nothing to men who had just had a good breakfast. The thought that we were at the end of our trail lent us wings.

It was a clear and sunny day, but bitterly cold. I was tired of surveying and only a stubborn urge to see the thing through to the end kept me at it. My hands froze and I warmed them by breathing on them.

We caught up with a peasant taking fish to the station.

"How can you work like that?" he asked me. "Aren't you cold?"

I told him my mittens were worn to shreds on the trip and that I had discarded them.

"Well, take mine," he said. "I have another pair."

He produced a pair of warm woollen mittens and handed them to me. I took them gratefully and went on with my work. We kept company for some two miles. I surveyed the terrain, while the peasant was telling me about himself, and cursed all and sundry. He spoke badly of his fellow-villagers, the neighbour's wife, the local teacher and priest. I had had enough of his invective. His horse plodded along at a slow pace, and I realized we should never reach the Iman at that rate. Pulling off the mittens I returned them to the peasant with thanks, wishing him luck. Then I lengthened my stride.

"What d'you mean?" he shouted after me. "Aren't you going to pay me?"

"What for?" I asked.

"The mittens," he replied.

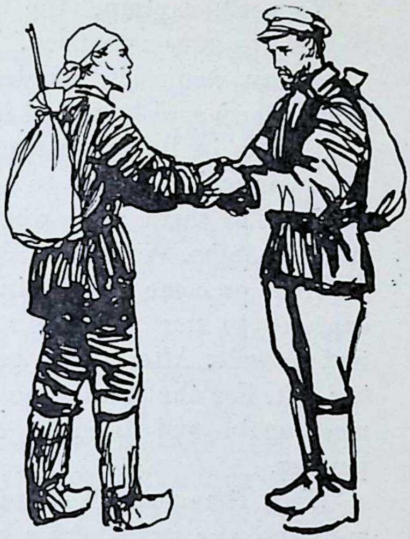
"But you got them back," I retorted.

"That's not the point," my benefactor uttered with displeasure. "I was kind to you, wasn't I?"

"Fine brand of kindness," my Cossacks rejoined, "kindness that you pay for."

Dersu was the angriest of all. He spat on the ground in disgust.

"Bad man," he said. "I don't want to see him. He has no face."



To "lose face" was tantamount to selling one's soul in the Gold's conception of things.

"How can such man live?" Dersu kept on. "I think he cannot live. Must soon die."

In the afternoon we reached the Hwaku River and called a brief halt.

It was less than two miles to the railway as the crow flies, but the milestone showed six. The road skirted a stretch of marshland. The wind carried to our ears the shrill whistles of railway engines, and we could even see the outlines of the station building.

I nursed the furtive hope that this time Dersu would assent to come with me to Khabarovsk. I was loth to part with him. And I detected that he kept particularly close to me in the last few days, that he was going to say something, to ask for something, and that apparently he was shy to do it. At long last, summoning up all his courage, he asked for cartridges. This gave me to understand that he meant to leave us.

"Don't go away, Dersu," I pleaded with him.

He sighed and said that he was afraid of city life. I suggested he should at least come with us to the railway station, where I would supply him with money and food.

"No need, captain," the Gold replied. "I find sable. Sables are same as money."

All my eloquence foundered upon his determination to go. Dersu said he would follow the Hwaku and would hunt sable in its upper reaches, and would then, after the snow melted, move to the Daubiho. He had an old Gold friend there, with whom he would spend the two spring months. We agreed that I should send a Cossack for him, or come myself, in the early summer, when I expected to start out on a new expedition. He promised to wait. After that I gave him all the cartridges I had left. For the third time I told him where we should meet again and tried in every way to prolong our parting.

"Well, time to go," Dersu muttered and inserted his arms into the straps of his knapsack.

"Good-bye, Dersu," said I, shaking his hand warmly. "Thanks for helping us. I shall never forget all you did for us."

Dersu was about to reply, but, overcome, began polishing the butt of his rifle with his sleeve. We stood in silence, looking at each other, shook hands again and parted ways. He turned left along a watercourse, and we continued straight down the road.

Some distance away I looked back and saw the Gold. He had come to a pebble-stone shallow and was inspecting someone's footprints. I called to him and waved my cap. He waved back.

"Farewell, Dersu," I thought to myself, and walked on. The Cossacks followed in my tracks.

We were tired to the point of exhaustion. The men trailed along, each on his own. A mere two miles separated us from the railway station, but they came harder than the twenty earlier in our journey. Summoning up the remnants of our strength we shuffled on to the station, but some three hundred paces short of it sank to the railway track for a breather. The railway workers who passed us were surprised to see us resting so near the station. One of them joked:

"Looks like the station is pretty far away."

At last we came to the settlement and stopped at the first inn. A city man would probably turn his nose up at its shabby appointments, the high prices and the dirt, but to me it was paradise. We took two rooms and made ourselves very comfortable.

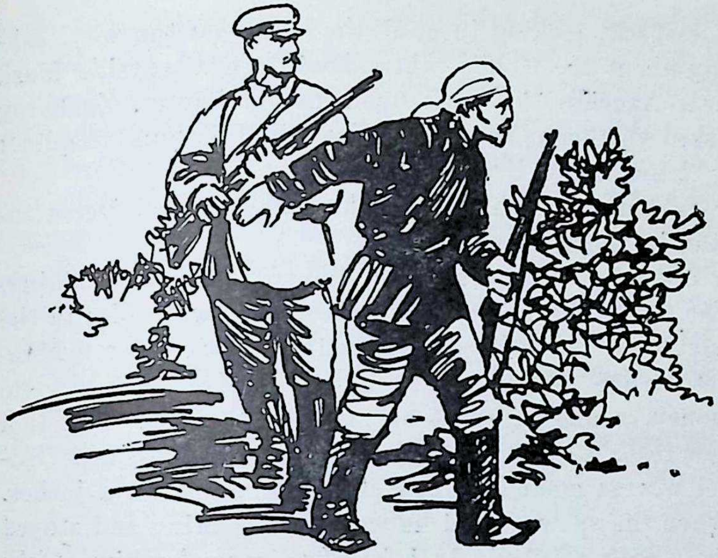
The hardships were all behind us. At once there was the wish to see the latest papers. I kept thinking of Dersu. "Where is he now?" I wondered. "Probably made camp somewhere along the bank, gathered fire-wood, laid a fire, and is now lolling about with a pipe between his teeth." It was with this thought that I fell asleep.

I rose early the next morning. The thought that I should not have to carry the knapsack gave me great pleasure.

In the evening we had a bath. Then we had tea together for the last time. The train came soon and we occupied our places in it.

On November 17 we arrived in Khabarovsk.

# PART THREE



# 21. THE START

IN THE SPRING of 1907 I prepared a new expedition. I was going to explore the central portion of the Sikhota-alin and the shore line north of the place where we broke off the year before.

It was all to be much the same as in 1906. Only we would have mules this time, instead of horses. They were sure-footed and less discriminating about what they ate. Merzlyakov, my assistant, was to take them by ship to Rynda Bay and leave them there with three of the men. He was then to arrange for food stores along the sea-coast. Zakharov was sent to find Dersu. He went on horseback, looking in at all the fanzas on the way, asking about the Gold's whereabouts. In a wayside fanza near Anuchino he came upon an old hunter. Zakharov asked whether he knew Dersu Uzala, and the hunter replied:

"I am Dersu Uzala."

Zakharov told him about his mission, and Dersu instantly packed his things.

I was happy to see Dersu. We spent the day talking. The Gold told me how he had trapped two sables in the winter and exchanged them with a Chinese for a blanket, an axe, a kettle and a tea-pot. He also received some money, which he spent on material to make himself a new tent. Russian hunters sold him cartridges, and Udehei women made him new shoes, trousers and a jacket. When the snow melted he went to Anuchino and stayed there with a friend. As I failed to come for him at the appointed time he took up hunting and bagged a stag with new horns, which he turned in to a Chinese trader, with whom he now had credit.

In Anuchino, incidentally, he was robbed. He met a woodsman and trustfully told him that he had bagged and sold two sables that winter. The woodsman invited him to a pub for a drink. Dersu assented willingly and, feeling the liquor going to his head, gave his new acquaintance all his money for safekeeping. When Dersu awoke the next morning the woodsman had vanished. Dersu could not grasp the whole thing. The people of his tribe trusted each other with furs and money, and nothing ever went astray.

At the time there was no regular sea route along the Japan Sea coast line.

We had bad luck. The only vessel that made occasional coastwise runs, the s.s. *Eldorado*, had left Vladivostok two days before. We should have been stranded high and dry if not for a gracious offer to make the voyage on torpedo boats. Their course lay to the Shantar Islands and I was promised passage to Dzhigit Bay.

In the open sea we met whales and finfishes. The former kept to their course at a measured rate, paying little attention to the torpedo boats, but the finfishes gave chase to our vessels, and when we drew level with them, began leaping out of the water. Zagursky, one of my men, got his rifle out and hit a fish after two misses. A large stain of blood tinged the surface of the sea and all the fish vanished instantly.

Towards nightfall we came to Amerika Bay, where we dropped anchor overnight.

A gale lashed the sea to fury, but in the morning the torpedo boats put out in spite of the rough weather. I came up on deck. The boats steamed in line in the *Grozny*'s wake. Next in formation to us was the *Besshumny*. She would plunge into deep watery ravines, then rear up on a white-crested wave, and every time the foaming masses of water drove up against her nose it seemed they would swallow the frail craft; then the sea receded, running off the deck, and the torpedo boat would come to the surface, labouring on stubbornly against the elements.

It was dark when we arrived in Olga Bay, where we spent the night.

The sea was somewhat calmer, the wind fell, and the fog began to clear. Next morning the sun appeared, lighting up the sullen rocky shore.

By evening the torpedo boats reached Dzhigit Bay, but we remained aboard. The boats rode out a swell all night, rolling from side to side, and I waited impatiently for daybreak. The feel of solid land under our feet was a relief. As the torpedo boats weighed anchor the wind carried good luck wishes to us, shouted by their crew through megaphones.

As the little vessels faded in the distance we began pitching tents and gathering fire-wood. One of my men went to look for water and reported on returning that a multitude of fish was struggling at the river-mouth. We caught so many of them in our sweep-net that we could not pull it ashore. They turned out to be *gorbusha* salmon—not as ugly yet as they would eventually become, though their jaws had already begun to turn up somewhat, and a small hump had already formed on their backs. I let the men take only a few fish, and released the rest. We ate our fill of the salmon, and in the end it turned our stomachs even to look at it.

A period of inactivity followed until our pack-animals arrived in late June aboard the *Eldorado*. That was a happy day. We were thoroughly tired of waiting.

The *Eldorado* anchored some twelve hundred feet off the river-mouth. The mules were lowered right into the sea. They got their bearings at once and swam for shore, where they were rounded up by my men.

It took us two days to fit the packs and saddles to the mules, but finally we got under way. As we approached the edge of the settlement Dersu asked for permission to stay a bit longer with his friends. He promised to catch us up by dusk the following day. I was afraid that he might lose us, but the Gold only laughed.

"You are not a needle and not a bird—cannot fly. You walk and leave footprints. And I have eyes."

I knew his astounding faculty of reading tracks and withdrew my objections. On the morning of the next day he joined us, and we discovered that by reading our tracks he knew of everything that transpired in his absence. He had spotted our halting places, saw that we made a long halt where the path ended, and that I sent my men ahead to look for the road. One of them had changed his boots, and the Gold spotted that too. A blood-stained rag and piece of cotton wool told him someone had ill-fitting shoes, etc. I knew well of his extraordinary powers, but it was a revelation to my men. They sized him up with a mixture of curiosity and admiration.

One of our mules had a lazy streak, and the pack train lagged behind. Dersu and I had to make frequent stops and wait for it. We told the men we should leave signals at road forkings to show which way we went, and walked off in advance of the main body.

Suddenly the path forked, one arm leading upriver, and the other turning right. We had to leave a signal. Dersu stuck a twig into the ground, bent it, pointing the broken end in the direction we had chosen. Certain that the men would grasp the meaning of our sign, we went on. But after some two miles we stopped. I cannot recall what it was I had left behind in one of the packs. We waited for quite some time, and then retraced our steps to the forking, where we discovered that the men had missed our signal and had taken the wrong road. Dersu was furious.

"What kind of men are they," he gasped indignantly. "Walk and shake their heads like babies. Have eyes, but see nothing. Such men cannot live in the mountains. Soon die."

It was not so much their missing our signal that surprised him. It was beyond him how they could continue along a road which bore no trace of our footprints. Furthermore, in passing they had trampled on our twig. It had not been a mule's hoof, Dersu established, but the foot of a man.

Invective, however, got us nowhere. I raised my rifle and fired twice into the air. The replying shot came a minute later from afar. I fired again. Then we made a campfire and waited. In half an hour the men returned. They shifted the blame on us, saying we had made the signal too small. The Gold kept his peace. He realized that things obvious to him were not necessarily obvious to other people.

After a meal we went on, Dersu and I walking in advance. The men were told to keep their eyes on the path and not repeat their error. In two hours we came to another forking. Dersu shook off his knapsack and began gathering dead-wood.

"It's too early to make camp," I said. "Let's go on."

Dersu replied with a straight face: "I'm not gathering fire-wood. I want to block up the second path, so there'll be no mistake."

I was amused. He gathered a pile of dead-wood, cut down shrubs, and bent some of the near-by trees to the ground. The barricade had its effect. The men could not miss this man-made impediment.

The Yotsiho should have been called Roe River. The stately animals visited its banks in great numbers.

The roe deer is a rusty brown in summer and a greyish brown in winter. Near the haunches and tail its fur is white. Its protective colouring makes the animal absolutely invisible. The white spot is all the hunter sees of it. That is why the taiga people call that spot a "mirror."

The roe is a timid animal, afraid of man and beast. Always on the alert, it relies on a keen sense of smell and hearing. Most of the time it keeps to the swampy deciduous forests, coming out to graze in the meadows at dusk. But even when grazing amidst the silence of the wilderness it keeps its ear cocked for signs of danger. When in flight the roe jumps across ravines and over bushes and piles of dead-wood with astounding alacrity.

Surprisingly, the roe suffers the presence of other animals readily enough, but cannot stand the red deer. It perishes in any man-made preserve where the presence of red deer is forced upon it. It comes to feed in the salt marshes regularly, for instance, until the day the red deer appear. After that it avoids them studiously.

We often spotted roes dashing out of the tall grass, but each time they vanished in the thickets just as abruptly as they appeared. And we failed to bag a single one.

Where the Sinantsa meets the Yotsi River we plunged into the taiga proper. The branches overhead shut out the sky. The giant poplars and cedars were bigger than any we had seen before. The forty-year-old trees rising in their shade looked like miserable weeds by their side. The lilac, commonly no more than a bush, here reached the size of a tree two feet in circumference and some thirty-five feet in height. The aged, moss-grown deadwood blended with the luxuriant greenery about it.

The dense underbrush of aralias, grape-vines and lianas impeded our progress. We advanced slowly, making frequent halts and looking for a corridor through the solid mass of fallen timber.

But the farther we went, the more there was of it. The path was entirely unsuited for pack-animals. To hasten progress we sent a group under Zakharov to clear the way. Some fallen trees hung in the air, cradled in the branches of living trees. We only cleared some of their branches and passed under them, as through a natural kind of portal. The fallen timber on the ground also had to be cleared of branches, lest the mules injure their legs or bellies.

Near the mouth of the Sinantsa we met up with the family of a hunchback Udehei hunter. The Udeheis had waded far out into the stream along a pebble bank and were catching fish. A boat lay bottom up on the pebbles near their camp site. The boat was new, and fresh burns along its sides showed that it had not as yet made its maiden voyage. The hunchback explained that he himself knew nothing of boat-making, and had his nephew Chan Lin come for that purpose from the Takema River. We proposed that Chan Lin accompany us. He agreed.

We set out early the next day. The day's march was to be long. We were keen on reaching the Sanhopu, where I was to begin my explorations. Dersu and I walked in front as usual, while Merzlyakov stayed behind with the mules. At the edge of a ravine we stopped. A strange noise reached our ears, something between a howl and a squeal, with the hint of a growl in it. Dersu clutched at my sleeve, listened intently, and said it was a bear. We advanced cautiously, soon catching a glimpse of the noise-maker. It was a bear of medium size, fussing round a lime-tree. The tree stood hard by a rising rock, and bore an axe-mark. The mark went to show someone had discovered and claimed the beehive in it long before us and before the bear.

I took in the situation at a glance: the bear was getting at the honey. It stood on its hind legs, stretching up to it. But it could not reach the hollow with its paw because of the rock. However, it had all the patience in the world. Growling, it shook the tree with all its might. Bees droned about its head, stinging painfully. It rubbed its snout with its paws, squealed shrilly, rolled on the ground, and again resumed its task. Its capers amused me greatly. At long last it had enough and sat down in much the way human beings do, opening wide its mouth and gazing pensively at the tree. It reflected for a minute or two, got up and, rolling up to the tree, clambered to its top. Once up in its crown, it wedged itself in between the rock and tree and, setting its legs against the cliff, pressed its back against the tree-trunk. The tree gave way slightly, but apparently the bear was uncomfortable and changed its position. This time its back was pressed against the rock and its legs set against the tree. The tree cracked under its pressure and tumbled to the ground.

That was just what the bear was after. It remained now to pick out the honeycombs.

"Very cunning," Dersu commented, and added: "Must chase him away, or he eat all the honey." Then he raised his voice: "You bad man, why you steal honey?"

The bear turned its head, then bounded away, disappearing behind the rock.

"Must frighten him," Dersu said and fired into the air.

Our mule train came up just then. We decided to leave two men behind to pick the honey out of the hollow. It would take some time. The bees had to be given a chance to settle down, they would have to be smoked out of the hollow, and only then the men would be able to gather the spoils. And should we not do it, the bear would.

The end of our journey to the Sanhopu passed without incidents. We came to Terney Bay at four in the afternoon with about twenty pounds of excellent honey.

On the Sanhopu we met Chen Pao, the sergeant, and spent the day with him. It developed that he knew a good deal of what had befallen us the year before on the Iman.

I was happy to learn that he meant to come north with us. His knowledge of the coast and his prestige among the Chinese would be of great help to us.

## 22. THE FLOOD

We marched north along the crest of a ridge and descended the Ostraya Mountain along the bank of a mountain stream to the Bilimba River.

After letting our animals graze for a bit, we went upriver. Both its banks were so densely wooded that it seemed the stream flowed along a living green corridor. The vast canopy of woods overhung the water, meeting in midstream and forming picturesque arches.

The weather was gloomy; it was cold and damp, and the trees seemed to be weeping. Their boughs shed large drops of rain-water. Even the trunks were wet.

The valley gradually became narrower. Along the way we came upon several abandoned hunting lodges. Judging by their appearance, they were used by Chinese sable-trappers in the winter-time.

After a brief halt in one of them we came to the upper reaches of the river close on midday. The path had ended. From now on we made our way over untrodden ground, crossing from bank to bank in search of footpaths.

I planned to climb the Sikhota-alin and descend the Kulumba, but Dersu and Chen Pao cautioned me against going too far afield. Chen Pao urged us to return to the Bilimba and seek the shelter of the hunting lodges. His advice was so obviously sound that we took it. A large cloud of fog hung over the pass that morning. Later in the day heavy clouds crept over the ridge. Dersu and Chen Pao walked in front. They kept glancing up at the sky and spoke in undertones. I knew how weather-wise Dersu was, and if he saw cause for alarm there was unquestionably good reason for it.

At about four we neared the first of the hunting lodges. An uncommonly dense fog shrouded the countryside. We increased our pace and reached the second lodge before dusk. It was cosier than the first, and larger.

In a few minutes the fanza was made snug and comfortable. We piled all its property in one corner, swept the floor, and lit a fire. There was no draft in the chimney and the fanza soon filled with smoke. That may have been on account of the fog, or because the stove had been out of use for so long. We had to raise its temperature with hot coals, but it was long after dusk that the fire began burning properly and the k'angs grew warm at last. The men made a large campfire outside the fanza, sipped hot tea, and with much lusty laughter told each other fireside tales. Dersu and Chen Pao sat by another fire in total silence, pulling on their pipes. We put our heads together and decided to march on the next day, provided it did not rain. It was high time to get away from the river, because its level would soon rise and we should face the unhappy prospect of making a detour across the rocky crags of the Onku, or Chugdyni which is Udehei for "Devil's Lair."

The night passed without incidents.

It was still dark when Chen Pao roused us. He was one for knowing the time without the aid of time-keepers. We had a hurried breakfast and set out before sunrise. The sky was a threatening grey. The mountains were shrouded in a cloak of fog or rain dust. Judging by the hour, the sun was long overdue. Soon a drizzle began, and a new sound—the whistling of wind—mingled with the rustling patter of the rain.

"Starting," Dersu muttered, pointing to the sky.

Through a rent in the blanket of fog we had a fleeting glimpse of clouds running due north-west. All of us were drenched to the skin. Nothing mattered any longer. The rain was no more an obstacle. To avoid the tedious skirting of towering cliffs, we descended to the river and marched along the pebble bank. Spirits ran high and the men went in for a good deal of horse-play, laughing and pushing each other into the water. Close on three the gorges and their perils were left behind.

In the forest the wind did not bother us, but every time we approached the river bank it chilled us to the bone. At five we came to another hunting lodge. It was perched on the left bank of the river on the edge of a narrow creek. We had to ford the stream to reach it. While the men made camp, Chen Pao and I climbed a near-by mountain and surveyed the Bilimba valley. A biting wind was driving a fog in from the sea. The fog rolled towards the mainland in a succession of giant waves and mingled with the rain-clouds over the mountains.

At dusk we returned. There was a fire in the fanza. I lay down on the k'ang, but it took me unusually long to fall asleep. The rain lashed against he window s; overhead, apparently on the roof, strips of birch-bark were flapping in the wind, which howled ominously. There was no telling whether all that whistling was caused by the downpour or by the groaning, desolate bushes and trees. The storm raged through the night.

Early next morning a loud noise roused me. There was no need to leave the fanza to ascertain what caused it. The rain poured down in torrents. Powerful gusts of wind shook the fanza to its foundations.

I dressed hurriedly and stepped outdoors. Fantastic things were going on. Rain, fog and clouds mixed in a ghoulish dance. The giant cedars swayed noisily from side to side, as though complaining of their fate.

I noticed that Dersu was on the river-bank. He was studying the water.

"What are you doing?" I asked him.

"Looking at the stones; water is rising," he replied, and carped at the Chinese who built the lodge so close to the riverside. The fanza indeed stood on a low stretch of the bank and was sure to be inundated in the event of a flood.

Close on midday Dersu and Chen Pao held a conference, after which they went off into the forest. I flung a rain-coat over my shoulders and followed. They came to the foot of the mountain I had ascended the day before, and began stacking fire-wood. I wondered what they would do with it at such a distance from the camp. But I did not interfere and climbed a hillock in the vain hope of seeing the Bilimba valley. All I saw was a wall of rain and fog. Sheets of rain swept across the forest like waves. After minutes of comparative calm the storm seemed to be making up for lost time by raging with greater force.

Drenched and cold I returned to our fanza and sent the men to Dersu for fire-wood. They returned empty-handed, Dersu and Chen Pao had declined to give it to them. I knew Dersu always had a good reason for what he did, and went with the men to gather wood up the creek.

Dersu and Chen Pao returned some two hours later. They were drenched to the skin, threw off their wet clothes, and warmed themselves by the fire. Before dusk I went to have another look at the river. It was rising steadily, but to all appearances would hardly leave its banks before morning. Nonetheless, I ordered the men to pack our things and hold the mules in readiness. Dersu approved of my precaution. In the evening, after dark, a torrential shower poured noisily. It was terrifying.

A flash of lightning illuminated the interior of our fanza, followed closely by a clap of thunder, which rolled across the skies in a hollow echo. The mules tore at their tethers. The dogs howled in fear.

Dersu was listening intently to what passed outside. Chen Pao sat by the door and they exchanged curt phrases from time to time. I said something, but Chen Pao silenced me with a gesture. I held my breath and also listened. My ear caught a gurgling sound. Dersu jumped to his feet and dashed out into the open. He returned a minute later and said the men should be wakened at once, for the river had left its banks and water was encircling our abode. The men were up in no time, pulling on their clothes. In their haste two of them put on the wrong boots and raised a laugh.

"Why you laugh?" Dersu shouted angrily. "Soon you cry."

The water was seeping in under the walls and already reached the fire-place. We gathered up our bedding in the weak light of the fire and rushed to our mules. They were knee-deep in water and looked about with frightened eyes. We strapped the packs on them by the light of torches. And it was high time we did. The water had washed a deep gully behind our fanza, and had we delayed any longer, we should never have been able to cross it. Dersu and Chen Pao ran off, and that frightened me terribly. I ordered the men to keep together and led them to the mountain I had ascended in the day-time. Darkness enveloped us. The rain and wind lashed in our faces as we rounded the corner of the fanza.

The rain was blinding. We had the impression that trees and mountains and the river, were all racing with the wind into a hooting whirlpool of darkness, forming a solid, swiftly moving, monstrous mass.

My men looked confused. At that instant I saw a wavering flame ahead of us, and knew at once that it was Dersu and Chen Pao. We had to cross a deep creek, and I ordered my men to put the mules between themselves and the current. It was no more than a hundred and fifty paces to the fire, but it took us quite some time to cover that distance. We got entangled in fallen timber, lost our bearings in the thickets, and then landed in water again. It was rushing down the valley, and I concluded that the whole forest was likely to be inundated by morning. At long last we reached the mountain. It was only at this juncture that I was able fully to appreciate Dersu's and Chen Pao's foresight. I knew now why they had been gathering fire-wood. They had driven poles into the ground and screened the fire from the wind with sheets of bark. We lost no time pitching our tents. The tall cliff, at whose foot we made camp, protected us from the wind. There was no question of sleep. We sat by the fire drying ourselves, while the elements raged with mounting fury. The roar of the river grew louder and louder.

At last dawn came. We could not recognize the terrain. There was no trace of our fanza. The forest was submerged; water was advancing upon our bivouac and it was high time to think of moving to a higher spot. The men did not need to be told twice. Some of them tackled the tents, and others cut down twigs to cover the damp earth. Dersu and Chen Pao began gathering fire-wood all over again. The removal took us about an hour and a half. The rain seemed to have subsided. But the respite was short-lived. A thick fog settled again, rising quickly, and a severe downpour followed. I have never seen such rain. The adjacent mountains and the forest were screened from view by a blanket of water. We withdrew to our tents.

Sudden shouts announced a new danger. It came upon us where we had least expected it. Water was running down the gorge at whose mouth we had pitched our encampment. But luckily the other side of the plateau was deeper. The water rushed there and soon washed a deep bed for itself. Chen Pao and I protected the fire from the rain while Dersu and the men fought with the water. There was no thought of keeping dry. We were happy enough to feel warm.

At times we had glimpses of a sullen and cloudy sky through rents in the fog. The clouds were travelling southwestwards, diametrically opposite to the direction of the wind.

"Bad," Dersu said, shaking his head. "This will last long time."

Before nightfall we each made a trip for fire-wood, to stock up for the night.

At dawn on August 12 there was a strong northwester, but it subsided shortly. The rain came down in torrents without let-up. We were all staggering from exhaustion. The tent had to be watched lest the wind tear it down, the fire had to be screened, and there was a shortage of fire-wood. There was also the brook to think of that rushed down the gorge past our encampment. The water often encroached upon our tents; we had to erect dams of a sort, and guide it away. The damp fire-wood smoked terribly. Our eyes smarted from all the smoke and lack of sleep. It was as though someone had thrown sand into them. The dogs, forlorn and miserable, lay under the rock without once looking up.

The river was a frightening spectacle. The head reeled at the sight of its swiftly rushing waters. It seemed the banks were moving in the opposite direction at the same break-neck speed. The valley, from slope to slope, was inundated. Forest giants, uprooted by the flood, crashed into the river, carrying along blocks of earth and the underbrush. The water snatched them up instantly and whirled them away. The river raged like an infuriated beast. It drove down the valley in mad leaps, craters of yellow foam boiling where its onward rush was held up by driftwood. Bubbles led a crazy dance on its surface. They swam with the wind, burst, and reappeared over and over again.

Another day passed. In the evening the rain and wind gained in strength. We spent that fourth night in a dazed stupor. And at dawn it was the same as the day before. The men huddled in the tents, covered with their greatcoats. Only Dersu and Chen Pao stayed by the fire to tend it, and they, too, were rapidly losing strength. I was on the verge of total prostration. I had no wish to eat, drink, or sleep. All I wanted was simply to lie still. Towards midday the sky seemed to clear somewhat, but the rain came down with unabated fury.

Suddenly short, powerful whirlwinds swept across the countryside. Each was followed by a spell of quiet. They came at ever growing intervals, but with mounting force.

"End is near," Dersu said.

This infused new life into the men. They rose to their feet. The rain came in fits, now as a shower, now as a drizzle. That lent the whole thing some variety and the hope of a turn in the weather. Close on dusk the rainfall subsided markedly and ceased altogether after dark. The sky cleared gradually. Stars twinkled sparsely overhead.

It was a regular treat to dry our things, drink tea and snuggle in under dry blankets.

We rose late next day. The sun gleamed through the rents in the clouds, hiding its visage, as if reluctant to see the havoc wreaked by the typhoon. Turbid streams roared in cascades down the mountain slopes. The leaves in the trees and the grass, freshly washed and wet, sparkled merrily. Raindrops, reflecting the sun's rays, sported all the colours of the rainbow. The countryside was returning to life.

Our progress across the inundated woodlands was inordinately difficult. The mules sank up to their bellies in the silt-laden soil, fell and wallowed about in utter exhaustion. It was dusk when we reached the mountains on the right of the valley. The pack-animals were at the end of their tether. So were the men. It was cold. We were all shivering, and ready to drop.

The next day we marched on, the water reaching to our knees. At dusk, when I lost hope of ever seeing the mouth of the Bilimba, we heard the sea. In the fog we had come to the shore, but became aware of it only when we saw the surf at our feet.

The sea looked unusual. It was a dirty yellow several miles out, and flotsam bobbed up and down on the waves. From afar it had the appearance of boats and sails and fishing scows. As the wind changed the flotsam was driven shoreward.

Two days after the storm the atmosphere composed itself. A calm set in.

## 23. A PERILOUS CROSSING

A spell of fine weather followed the storm and we were making rapid progress.

Every time our path approached the river my companions looked anxious. It turned out that the water in the Takema had risen dangerously after the recent rains, and we would have difficulty in crossing to the other bank. We held council and decided to try a crossing on a raft. The other alternative, which we kept in reserve, was to march to the upper reaches of the Ilimo and perform a circuit to the mouth of the Takema.

We had to find a backwater where the current was slower and the waters deep enough to float a raft. There was a stretch like that above some rapids, where the river-bed passed close to the opposite bank, and a long shoal, now submerged, ran along our side of the river. We felled three large spruces, cleared them of branches and twigs, cut them in half and produced a fairly dependable raft. It was ready at dusk, and we decided to postpone our crossing to the next day.

In the evening we held another council. As the raft would approach the bank Arinin and Chen Pao were to jump for shore. I was to throw the things and packs on the bank, while Chan Lin and Dersu steered the raft. It would then be my turn to jump, and Dersu's. Chan Lin was to jump last.

On the following day we piled our knapsacks in the middle of the raft, put our rifles on top of them, and took up our positions at the corners. The raft was instantly caught up by the stream and, despite all our efforts, carried far beyond the spot on the other bank where we had expected to land.

The moment the raft neared the opposite bank Chen Pao and Arinin, each snatching up two guns, jumped ashore. In jumping they pushed the raft back into midstream. As it shot past the bank I kept hurling our things ashore, while Dersu and Chan Lin tried hard to steer the raft back closer to the bank. I was poised for the leap when Chan Lin's pole snapped suddenly and he fell head over heels into the water. Coming up to the surface, he swam for shore. I snatched up a spare pole and ran to Dersu's assistance. An ugly rock jutted out of the water some distance away. Dersu shouted to me to hurry and jump, but I failed to grasp his meaning and laboured away with the pole. Then, before I knew it, he raised me in his arms and threw me into the water. I clutched at a bush and pulled myself on to the bank. The same instant the raft struck the rock, turned like a top and shot back into midstream with Dersu's desolate figure balancing in the middle of it.

We ran along the bank, proffering him the end of a pole. But it was out of his reach; furthermore, the river described a curve at that point, and the raft left us far behind. Dersu was making desperate efforts to steer it closer to the bank. But what was his puny strength pitted against that of the river? And a hundred feet ahead the rapids roared. Clearly, Dersu would be hurled down the rapids. The branch of a sunken poplar stuck out of the water close to the waterfall. As the raft neared the rocks it gathered momentum. Dersu's end appeared inevitable. I ran along the bank shouting like one possessed. Through the thickets bordering the water I saw him. He had abandoned the pole and poised himself on the edge of the raft. As the raft shot past the poplar he jumped like a cat and clasped his arms round it.

A minute later the raft reached the edge of the waterfall. At two separate moments we saw the logs rise out of the water. Then they were smashed to pieces on the rocks. A shout of untold relief escaped me. But a new, perplexing question arose. We had to rescue Dersu. How long could he hang on to the poplar? Its branch bent with the current at an angle of about thirty degrees. Dersu had a firm hold on it, clasping it with arms and legs. Unhappily, we had no rope. All the rope we had, had been utilized in tying the raft together, and was lost with it. What to do? Time would not wait. Dersu's arms would grow numb any minute, and then. . . .

We held hasty council. Chan Lin called our attention to Dersu, who was signalling to us with his arm, for his shouts were drowned in the noise of the water.

At long last we understood that he wanted us to cut down a tree. But to fell one right into the river in line with Dersu was a dangerous undertaking. It could knock him off his perch. We looked for a likely tree higher up but, on the point of tackling a large poplar, saw Dersu waving his arm negatively. Then our choice fell on a lime-tree, but Dersu waved again. Finally we came to a giant spruce. Dersu gestured his approval. We understood why. The spruce had no large branches, no boughs, and would not get stuck in midriver.

I noticed Dersu pointing to his belt. Chen Pao grasped the meaning of his gesture. Dersu was saying we should secure the spruce to the bank. I ransacked our knapsacks hurriedly, gathering up everything that would serve the purpose—gun straps, belts and leather thongs. Dersu's bundle contained a spare belt. We tied them all together, lashing one end to the base of the spruce.

We then tackled the tree with our axes. It swayed, then toppled slowly into the river. At that instant Chen Pao and Chan Lin clutched at the end of the belts and wound them round the stump. The current drove the trunk towards the waterfall. It described a large curve from midriver to the bank and as it was passing Dersu, he caught at its twigs with his hands. Then I stretched a pole to him, and we pulled him ashore.

I thanked the Gold profusely for pushing me off the raft in the nick of time. He was visibly embarrassed and mumbled something about there being no choice, for if he had jumped himself and I had remained, I should have perished, and that now we were both safe.

Past dangers are soon forgotten. No sooner was the danger behind us than we began to joke. Chan Lin laughed boisterously and cut capers to show how Dersu perched on the poplar. Chen Pao said Dersu hung on to the branch with so much resolve he thought the Gold was first cousin to a bear. Dersu gibed back at Chan Lin for falling into the water, and at me for making a landing without knowing how.

Next day we resumed our journey down the Takema valley and reached the sea in some three days. It was September 22. In an Udehei fanza I lay down on a clean straw mat with genuine pleasure. The hospitable natives showed us every consideration. They brought meat and tea and dried fish. I washed, put on clean underwear and tackled my work.

In the morning of September 25 we departed from Takema and set out northwards. I urged Chan Lin to come with us, but he refused. Sable time was near; he had to see to his nets and implements, and prepare for the winter hunting. I presented him with a small rifle, and we parted friends.

Two roads lead north from the Takema—one over the hills at some distance from the sea, and the other along the alluvial shore line. Merzlyakov with the mules took the first, and I the second.

In over two hours we came to the Kulumba. We forded it and ascended a terrace, where we made a fire and dried our clothing. From its height we had a fine view of the sea.

The salmon spawning season was in progress. Legions of the fish covered the bottom of the river. At times the fish stopped this pilgrimage, then, shaken out of their stupor, dashed madly to and fro. Chen Pao shot and killed two salmon, which made an excellent dinner.

At the northern end of the valley, where the coastal terrace merged with the mountains, a tall cliff rose in our path. We had to scale it, but found no hold on the stones—they were all loose. On the other side of the cliff a narrow pathway led along a ledge some 60 feet over the sea. The ledge was so narrow we should have to edge along it sideways, facing the stone wall, hanging on for dear life to projections in the sheer wall of the cliff. What was more, the path sloped markedly towards the sea. It had claimed many victims. The Udeheis called it Kule-Rapani, and the Chinese called it Van Sin Lat-sa, after Van Sin, the first Chinese to perish there. The ledge had to be negotiated barefooted or in soft dry shoes. In rainy weather, in the mornings after the dew and in frosty weather, when covered with an ice crust, it was impassable.

After fording the Kulumba our shoes were wet, and we had to put off our trip over the perilous ledge until the next day. So we turned to look for a likely camp site. At that instant the head of an animal appeared out of the water. The creature looked at us with obvious curiosity. It was a seal, a member of the suborder of pinnipeds, which live mostly in the water and crawl out on the rocks at intervals to catch their breath. Its sleep is light; it awakens every now and then and looks about. Its hearing and eyesight are better developed than the other senses. Ungainly on land, it is fleet in the water. When in its element it is daring to the point of indiscretion, and even attacks man. It is an inquisitive animal and displays a love for music. Hunters lure it by whistling or knocking sticks against metal objects.

Dersu shouted to it. It dived, but reappeared in a matter of seconds. He threw a stone. Again the seal dived, but came up and stared in our direction. The Gold lost patience. He snatched up the first gun that came to his hand and fired. The bullet raised a splash hard by the animal.

"You missed it, brother," I said.

"I only want to scare him," he replied.

I wanted to know why he was so intent on driving away the seal. It was counting how many men had come to the shore, he said. And it injured his hunter's pride to think that an animal did that sort of thing. Only man, to his mind, was entitled to count animals.

Chen Pao and Dersu went to inspect the cliff. They wanted to clear the path of loose stones and build steps wherever possible. Meanwhile I was plotting our further route. The farther north we would go, I found, the higher the coastal terraces would become.

At the foot of the Naining terraces we found a Korean fanza. Its occupants were crabmen and sable-trappers. Some distance from the fanza we saw the "bridges," as the people here called their sable-traps. The Koreans use dead-wood in building them, throwing fallen timber from one bank of the river to the other. On occasion, if the place found was particularly suitable and there was no dead-wood in the vicinity, they felled living trees. A picket of small twigs barred the passage half way across the log. The picket had a narrow opening with a hair-string loop suspended in it. The sides of the log were cut away to prevent the sable from by-passing the picket. One end of the loop was tied to a wooden stick held in place by a tiny prop. A stone weighing seven to ten pounds was tied to the stick. When the sable crossed a "bridge" of that kind and came to the picket, it tried by-passing the obstacle. Finding no other way, however, it tried to jump over the loop, got entangled in it, and knocked the stick off its support. The weight fell and pulled the valuable little beast with it into the water.

The Koreans regarded their sable-traps as superior, because they never failed. There have never been cases, they asserted, when the sable escaped. Furthermore, under water the sable was better preserved. Crows and jays had no access to it.

As we continued our journey due north we met up with our pack train that arrived by the other route. I wanted to go up the Amagu to its source, cross the Kartu Ridge and follow the Kulumba down to the sea-shore. The sectarians we met in those parts told me the two streams abounded in rapids, and that landslides were frequent up in the mountains. They advised us to leave the mules behind and proceed without our animals, carrying our belongings in knapsacks. Eventually I decided to make the journey alone, with only Dersu to accompany me. Chen Pao and one of my men were to go along for about two days and then return.

I reckoned we could take along food enough for two-thirds of the way. So I arranged it with Merzlyakov to send Sale, an Udehei, and two of the men to the Van Sin Latsa cliff, where they should leave a supply of provisions for us.

The following day, heavy knapsacks weighing down our shoulders, we set out.

A faintly visible path brought us to the spot where the Dunantsa flowed into the Amagu. After walking another mile we made our camp on a pebble bank.

It was an hour before sundown. I went hunting. The fall of leaves was at its height. The forest was taking on a monotonously grey, lifeless colouring, betokening the approach of winter. Only the oak groves yet retained their foliage, but it had turned a sorrowful yellow. The bushes, deprived of their luxuriant garment, looked surprisingly alike. Under its cover of fallen leaves, the cold black earth was sinking into a lethargic sleep; compliantly and unprotestingly, the plants were preparing for their death.

I was deep in thought and oblivious of why I had come here at this twilight hour. Suddenly I heard a loud noise behind me. I turned and saw an incongruous hunchbacked animal with white legs. Stretching its large head forward it was loping through the forest. I raised my gun and took aim, but a shot rang out before I had time to pull the trigger. The animal fell. A minute later I saw Dersu running down the steep slope to where his prey had fallen.

It was an elk—a young male specimen of some three years, weighing over 520 lbs.

The animal, awkward in appearance, had a powerful neck and a large elongated head with a thickset, hooked snout. Its fur was long, shining and smooth; the colouring was dark brown, almost black; the legs were whitish. The elk is an animal of meticulous habits: once troubled, it will for long abandon its favourite haunts. It trots along when in flight, and sometimes changes to a gallop. The elk likes to bathe in swampy lakes. When wounded, it turns tail, but in autumn it is liable to attack human beings. Then it rises on its hind legs, crosses its forelegs, and seeks to knock down its adversary. If successful, it tramples upon him.

In appearance the Ussuri elk is much like its European counterpart. Only its antlers are different. Not broad and palmate, they are rather like those of a red deer.

Dersu skinned the elk and carved up its meat. It did not make a pleasant sight, but I could not help admiring the skill and precision with which my friend worked. He had complete mastery over his knife. He did not make a single stroke too many, not a single unnecessary movement. His hand, quite obviously, was well practised. We decided to keep some of the meat, and let Chen Pao and Fokine take the rest back to the others.

After dinner Fokine and I turned in, while the Gold and Chen Pao settled down by the fire, which they undertook to tend.

I woke up in the middle of the night. An opaque spot hovered round the moon—a sure sign of frost the following morning. And, indeed, the temperature fell markedly before dawn. The puddles froze over.

Chen Pao and Dersu were the first to wake up. They added wood to the fire, boiled tea, and then roused Fokine and myself.

Amazing birds, the crows: how quickly they spot meat! No sooner did the sun's rays shed their gold upon the mountain-tops than several of the birds appeared over our bivouac. They called loudly to each other and hopped from tree to tree. One of them perched on a branch close to us, and cawed.

"That'll be the end of you," Fokine muttered, stretching for his rifle.

But Dersu stopped him.

"Don't shoot," he said. "He doesn't disturb. Crows also want to eat. He come to see if we are still here. Now he will go away. After we leave he will jump to earth and eat what is left."

Fokine appeared to see reason; at least, he put away his rifle and no longer cursed the crows, though they approached him closer than the first time.

I was suffering from thirst. Suddenly I spotted some red bilberries. They were frozen, and I ate them greedily. Dersu looked at me in wide-eyed surprise.

"What's their name?" he asked, rolling several berries on the palm of his hand.

"Bilberries," I said.

"You know for sure they are eatable?" he asked again.

"Certainly," I said. "Didn't you know?"

Dersu said he had seen bilberries often enough, but that he never knew they were edible.

In places there was so much of the berry that entire tracts of land appeared painted a bluish red.

In the evening I was putting down my observations while Dersu was roasting venison on a spit. During our meal I threw a bit of meat into the fire. Dersu pulled it out hastily and flung it to the ground.

"Why burn meat?" he asked me with displeasure. "Tomorrow we go, and later other people will come here. They can eat it."

"What people?" I asked in bewilderment.

"You don't know?" he asked in surprise. "Raccoon, badger or crow; if the crow does not, the mouse will; if the mouse does not, the ant will. There are all kinds of people in the taiga."

It dawned on me then that Dersu was not concerned for people alone. He had a care for animals as well, be they as insignificant as the ant. He loved the taiga and its denizens, and showed every solicitude for them.

## 24. HARD DAY'S MARCH

The frost struck again at dawn; the wet earth froze and crunched underfoot. We had bread for another two days. That did not particularly worry me. I reckoned it was not very far to the sea, where a supply of food was waiting for us on the Van Sin Latsa cliff.

At sunrise Dersu and I dressed and went on in high spirits. The Kulumba, hemmed in by mountains on both sides, twisted and turned between the cliffs. It all looked like a game between the mountain ranges and the river. The former sought to block the water's way, but the latter won out, and forcefully cleared its path to the sea.

There was no path. We had to traverse untrodden ground, and hoped to avoid fording the river by marching steadfastly round all obstacles along the bank. But soon we discovered it was a futile effort. The very first rock in our path made us cross to the other bank. I thought of changing my footwear, but Dersu advised me to go in my wet boots and keep warm by pushing on and on. No more than 600 yards away we were again compelled to cross to the right bank, then back again to the left, etc., etc. The water was ice-cold; my legs ached, as if clamped in vices.

Steep mountains rose on both sides, towering clifflike over us. We gave up the thought of skirting them. That would prolong our trip by at least another four days. We marched straight on, hoping to find an open valley beyond the cliffs. But we were soon to discover our mistake. More cliffs were ahead, and we kept crossing from bank to bank.

"Fie," Dersu muttered under his breath. "We walk like otters. Walk a bit and dive a bit. . . ."

It was an apt comparison. That was just how otters moved from place to place. We had either become accustomed to the water, or the sun had warmed us, or, perhaps, it was a little of both. At any rate, we lost our dread of wading across, and the water seemed less cold.

I ceased grumbling, and so did Dersu. Our path was a series of zigzags. We kept it up until noon when we came to a regular gorge. It stretched for a distance of about 500 yards, and we were obliged to wade the entire stretch. We would crawl up the bank and bask in the sun for a bit, and then waded on. I was out of breath. There was a flat spot among the cliffs at one point, with a lot of flotsam piled on it. We clambered out of the water and laid a large fire. Then we cooked our dinner.

In the evening I counted the number of crossings we had made to be thirty-two over a distance of 12 miles. That did not include the long wade through the gorge. At night clouds again gathered in the sky, and before dawn it began to rain. We rose earlier than usual, had a bite to eat, washed it down with tea, and set out again. The first five miles we had mostly to wade through water.

At last the narrow rocky part of the valley was left behind. The mountains seemed to crowd back. I was overjoyed, thinking the sea was near, but Dersu pointed to a bird and said it dwelt only in the heart of forests, far away from the sea. Again we had to cross the river, and the farther we went the deeper the crossings became. Several times we lit fires to warm ourselves.

At about two the drizzle turned into a downpour. We had to call a halt and seek shelter in the tent. I was quite chilled. My hands were freezing, the fingers stiff, and my teeth were chattering. All the fire-wood we found was damp and burned badly.

We started drying our clothes. I felt weak and feverish. Dersu pulled our last piece of dried bread out of the knapsack and proffered it to me. He urged me to eat, but I was beyond the thought of food. I had some hot tea and lay down by the fire, but could not get warm.

In the evening the rain almost ceased. There was a fine drizzle. Dersu did not sleep that night, but tended the fire.

At the crack of dawn the sky cleared. It grew cold so rapidly that the rain-water, suspended in drops on the tree branches, turned into icicles. The air grew clear and transparent. The moon, lit up by the rays of the rising sun, was brilliant, much as though it had washed its face.

The sun rose crimson and cold. I awoke with a splitting headache. There was a feverish languor and an ache in my bones. Dersu also complained of weakness. Our supplies had run out, but we did not miss the food. Instead, we had a bit of hot water and went on our way.

Soon we had to descend into the water again. It seemed to be particularly cold. When we clambered up the opposite bank we found it difficult to regain our warmth. But soon the sun rose above the mountains and the air grew warm.

We could not avoid crossing the river, hard as we tried. But we waded less frequently. After several miles the river broke up into creeks. The islands between the water-ways, overgrown with purple willow, teemed with grouse. We shot, and missed every time: our hands shook and we lacked the strength to take careful aim. We plodded along dejectedly one behind the other in complete silence.

Things seemed to brighten up, and I thought we had come to the sea at last. But bitter disappointment was in store for us. As we approached the clearing, we saw the forest uprooted and crushed to the ground—the aftermath of the storm of the year before. It was the same snow-storm that caught us when we were crossing the Sikhota-alin. This must have been the epicentre of the typhoon.

We should have to skirt the wind-fallen trees or take the road over the islands, making our way among the purple willows. We picked the last alternative, because we had no idea how large the storm-battered forest would turn out to be. The surface of the river was covered with flotsam. We could walk across freely almost at any point from bank to bank. The solid carpet of flotsam stretched for some four miles, if not more. Our progress was fairly slow. We made frequent stops. Then open water appeared. I added another 23 crossings to our previous total, lost count, and walked as in a daze, scarcely conscious of whether I trod firm ground or waded through water.

After midday we were on our last legs. I was entirely played out. So was Dersu. On one occasion we saw a wild hog, but our thoughts were far away. We made camp early.

I had shot my bolt, shivering from head to foot, and for some reason my face, feet and hands swelled. Dersu did all the work himself that evening. I have a vague recollection of cold water being put on my brow, and have no idea how long I was in that condition. When I regained consciousness I saw that I was covered with the Gold's leather jacket. It was evening; bright stars studded the sky. Dersu was sitting by the fire, spent and weary.

It developed that I had been delirious for more than twelve hours. Dersu had not closed an eye all that time, ministering to my needs. He put wet rags on my brow and kept my feet warm. I asked for a drink, and he handed me a herb decoction with a revoltingly sweetish flavour.

Dersu insisted that I should swallow as much of it as I could. Then we lay down together under the tenting and fell asleep.

The night's sleep invigorated Dersu somewhat, but I was still played out. However, we could by no means camp another day. There was not a crumb to eat. We got to our feet with a superhuman effort and trudged along down-river.

The valley widened gradually. The fallen timber and singed woodland remained behind. Cedars, spruces and firs gave way to birch groves, purple willows and the larch.

I staggered drunkenly as I walked. Dersu was also ready to drop. We glimpsed tall cliffs ahead of us, and crossed to the opposite bank in good time. At this point the Kulumba broke up into eight arms. That was a blessing to us. Dersu tried to cheer me up as best he could. He would wisecrack, but I could see by his face that he was suffering no less than I.

"Sea-gull!" he shouted suddenly, pointing to a white bird flitting through the blue. "Sea must be near."

The notion that we were near the end of our sufferings infused new strength into me. But now again we had to cross to the left bank of the Kulumba, which converged here to a single bed. The current was swift. A long larch lay across the river. It swayed precariously as we crossed it. The crossing took up a long time. Dersu first carried the guns and knapsacks to the other bank, and then returned to help me.

At long last we came to the Yan Tun cliff. Here, on the edge of an oak grove, we sat down to regain our breath. It was still close on a mile to the sea-shore. The valley curved sharply to the south-east.

Gathering up our remaining strength we staggered on. Soon the oak grove thinned and the sea sparkled some distance ahead.

Our trying journey was over. The men were supposed to have delivered supplies for us here. We could camp there and then until we recovered.

At six in the afternoon we approached the Van Sin cliff, and failed to find the expected supplies. Bitterly disappointed, we searched every nook and corner, looked under the dead-wood, behind the rocks, but all in vain. There was still one ray of hope. The men may have left the provisions on the other side of the cliff. The Gold volunteered to go and see. On climbing to the summit he saw that the ledge, which he would have to cross, was covered with ice, and did not venture any farther. He scanned the shore from his high perch, but discovered nothing. On descending, he told me the sad news and tried to console me.

"Never mind, captain," said he, "we always can find food on the sea-shore."

We walked into the surf and turned up a stone. A covey of little crabs scattered from under it. They sought shelter under other rocks near by. We started catching them with our bare hands and soon had several dozen, plus about a hundred shellfish. Then we chose a likely spot for our bivouac and made a large fire. We cooked the crabs and ate the shellfish raw. True, it was not much, yet it served to slake our hunger.

My fever had gone, but I was still weak. Dersu planned to go hunting early the following morning and turned in before dark.

Exhausted by the hard trip and the fever I lay down at his side and fell asleep instantly.

There was only the hint of dawn when I awoke. The dark of night wrestled with the twilight, but was plainly powerless to stop the oncoming flush of day, which lit up the calm sea and the deserted shore.

Our fire had almost died down. I wakened Dersu and we started fanning the embers. At that time two abrupt sounds, much like howls, reached my ear.

"That's a red deer," I said to my companion. "Hurry. You might bag it."

Dersu gathered up his things in silence, but stopped, pondered, and said:

"No, that is not deer. He cannot cry this time of year."

The sounds were repeated, and we made out clearly this time that they came from the sea. They seemed familiar, but I could not remember where I had heard them before.

I was sitting by the fire with my back to the sea, and Dersu sat facing me. Suddenly he jumped to his feet and said, pointing seawards:

"Look, captain."

I turned and saw the *Grozny* rounding the cape.

We fired into the air and threw seaweeds into the blaze. A column of white smoke rose to the sky. The *Grozny* sounded several shrill blasts on its siren and turned our way. They had sighted us. I felt as though a mountain was lifted from my shoulders. We were both jubilant.

A few minutes later the skipper of the mine-sweeper was giving us a warm welcome.

It turned out that on the way from the Shantar Islands he had looked in at the mouth of the Amagu and learned from Merzlyakov that I had gone to the hills and was to return to the coast somewhere near the Kulumba, The sectarians told him that Sale and two of the men were supposed to deliver supplies for me to the Van Sin cliff but that their boat was smashed in a storm. They had returned instantly to the Amagu for new supplies, with which they expected to make a second try. That was when the skipper of the *Grozny* decided to join in the search, and it was his signals that I had taken for the roar of a red deer.

We scarcely noticed the time fly as we steamed to the Amagu, seated comfortably as we were at a table laden with good things to eat.

Merzlyakov, who complained of rheumatism, asked to be relieved. He wanted to return to Vladivostok, and I assented readily. I sent two men with him and told them to meet me on the Bikin River with supplies and winter clothing.

An hour later the *Grozny* weighed anchor.

Only six men remained with me now: Dersu, Chen Pao and four men who did not want to return to Vladivostok and volunteered to stay with me till the end of my expedition.

## 25. LOWER REACHES OF THE KUSUN

The next five days I rested and prepared for the march north along the coast.

Winter was near. The bare trees, skeleton-like, looked desolate and lifeless. The gorgeous, deep-dyed tints of early autumn were gone. Finding fodder for the mules was becoming a problem, and I decided to leave the animals with the sectarians until spring.

In the morning of October 20 we set out, When we came to the river it was close on two o'clock. A strong wind blew from the sea. Waves crashed noisily against the shore, running up the beach in foaming turmoil. A sand-bank stretched from the river into the sea. I stepped on it without apprehension of any kind and suddenly sensed a heavy weight in my legs. About to retreat, I realized in terror that I could not budge off the spot. Slowly, inch by inch, I was being sucked in.

"Quicksands!" I screamed, setting the butt of my rifle on the ground for support, but it sank too.

The men were slow to realize the meaning of my words. They looked in confusion at my movements. But Dersu and Chen Pao came up at that moment and instantly ran to my aid. Dersu stretched his musket-rest to me, and Chen Pao threw flotsam at my feet. Clutching a piece of dead-wood I extricated first one leg and then the other and crawled back to solid land.

According to Chen Pao quicksands are fairly common along the coast. The swell of the sea, breaking upon the shore, loosens up the sand, turning it into a man-trap. When the surf subsides, the bank becomes passable again for man and even for draught animals. There was nothing to do but to wait for a turn in the weather. At night the sea grew calmer. Chen Pao was right: the sand grew solid underfoot, so solid, in fact, that we left no footprints as we walked over it.

We came to the edge of a sheer precipice—an ancient river-terrace. The sparse wood and shrubbery remained behind. The Kusun valley spread out before us. Chinese fanzas shimmered in the distance.

When dwellings heave into sight after a long journey, men, horses and dogs stride with added vigour. Descending the terrace, we walked on cheerfully. My dog ran ahead, examining the shrubs along the roadside. We soon came to the fields. The crops were harvested and stacked. Suddenly Alpa cocked its ears. "Could it be pheasants?" I thought to myself and readied my rifle.

Alpa showed signs of embarrassment. She looked back, as much as to ask whether she should go on pointing or give up the hunt. I gave her the sign, and she moved forward cautiously, sniffing the air. I could see by the way she acted that it was not pheasants she had spotted. Suddenly three birds rose simultaneously into the air with a loud whirring. I fired and missed. The birds flew heavily, flapping their wings laboriously, and landed clumsily in the yard of the nearest fanza. They turned out to be domestic hens. The natives did not feed them, and they looked for food in the fields. This took them far away from their homes. The faculty of flying was apparently developed in them gradually, through continuous exercise. Scared up by some animal they had to seek safety in flight, and resorted to the use of their wings.

We came to the fanza of an old Udehei called Liurl. His family comprised five males and four women.

The Kusun River Udeheis employ Chinese labourers to do their farming for them. Their garments are a cross between Chinese and Udehei clothes, and they generally speak Chinese, reverting to their native tongue only when exchanging confidences. The costumes of the women were floridly embroidered, with bright buttons, sea-shells, bells and suchlike copper frippery adorning the chest, skirt and sleeves, so that their every movement caused tintinnabulation.

Some forty years before so many Udeheis peopled the coastal regions that, as Liurl colourfully described it, swans flying from the Samarga River to Olga Bay turned from a brilliant white to slate black owing to all the smoke rising from the Udehei yurts along the way.

In the backwaters of the Kusun we came upon an old boatman, a Manchu by name of Hai Pa-tou, meaning naval chief. He was an experienced seafarer who sailed along the Ussuri coast ever since a child. His father before him had plied the same trade. Chen Pao talked him into accompanying us along the shore. The Udeheis were to bring our trappings to the mouth of the Kusun and load them on Hai's boat the next day.

I rose early and lost no time in making my final preparations for the journey. I knew from experience that the Udeheis had to be urged, lest it take hours to get under way. They had begun on their footwear, then they mended their boats, and we set out no earlier than midday.

At the Kusun we parted with Chen Pao. He was being recalled to the Sanhopu River. He refused to take money from me and promised help if I should return to the coast the following year. We shook hands and parted.

The days were so warm that we walked in our shirts, putting on sweaters in the evenings. At night, however, we needed fur blankets. I ordered the warm clothing to be sent on by sea. All we took with us was a supply of provisions. Hai was to meet us with his boat in the mouth of the Takhoba.

In the lower reaches of the Takhoba the valley is sparsely wooded, with elms, lime-trees, oaks and black birches predominating. The open, inhabited land was somewhat higher up, over a mile from the sea.

Here we came upon a small fanza. I took its occupants to be Udeheis and learned only later that they were Solons.

It was a family of ten—the old father, and his two adult sons with their wives and five children. They had lived on the Sungari River in Manchuria and had migrated to the bank of the Nor, a tributary of the Ussuri, where there was better hunting. When bandit gangs infested the area the Chinese Government sent troops to combat them. The Solon family found itself between the hammer and the anvil. On the one hand, they were attacked by bandits, and on the other by the troops, who dealt destruction indiscriminately. The Solons fled to the Bikin, crossed the Sikhota-alin, and settled on the coast.

During the next four days I explored the Takhoba and Kumuho rivers.

The youngest of the Solons, named Da-Parl, volunteered to accompany us. He was a well-built, beardless youngster with a proud bearing, and a trace of disdain for my men. I found

myself admiring his light gait, and the grace and agility of his movements.

Two days later we set out on our journey. Dersu, Da-Parl and I walked ahead, following the left bank of the river, and Zakharov and Arinin lagged some fifteen paces behind us. Suddenly we glimpsed a squirrel perched on a fallen log. It was sitting on its haunches, its tail pressed against its back, cracking nuts. At our approach it scurried up a tree, looking down curiously. Da-Parl tiptoed stealthily to the tree, emitted a sudden whoop and struck the trunk with his stave. The squirrel started and dropped its cedar-cone, spurting higher up the tree. That was all the Solon was after. He picked up the cone and walked on cheerfully, paying not the slightest attention to the little animal. The squirrel kept jumping from branch to branch, voicing its displeasure at this daylight robbery. We were highly amused by the incident.

"Don't be angry," Dersu addressed the squirrel consolingly. "We walk along the ground and cannot find nuts. Look, you'll find plenty there." And he pointed to a large cedar.

The day was murky. A web of feathery clouds floated in the sky. Rings appeared round the sun, shrinking gradually, until they formed an opaque blotch. The forest was quiet, and only a breeze roamed in the tree-tops. This appeared to worry both Dersu and the Solon. They whispered to each other and kept looking up at the sky.

"Bad," said I. "The wind is blowing from the south."

"No," Dersu muttered, "he is going that way," and pointed north-east.

I thought he was mistaken, and said as much.

"Look at the bird!" Dersu retorted.

A crow was perched on a near-by spruce, facing north-eastwards. Dersu was right as usual. Birds always face the wind, so it slides off their feathers.

Towards evening the sky was overcast, the earth no longer reflected the warmth of the sun and the temperature rose from 2 to 10° C above zero. That was another ominous sign. We made our tents fast and gathered fire-wood.

But our fears were idle. The night passed quietly.

First thing in the morning I looked at the sky. Clouds swam from north to south. There was no time to lose. We hastily gathered our things and marched up the Takhoba. I expected to reach the Sikhota-alin that day, but bad weather foiled my plans.

A thick mist gathered at noon. The mountains turned a depressing deep blue. There was a downpour at four, followed by a sleety, dense snow. The path turned white, and we could follow it with our eyes far into the thickets. A strong, gusty wind rose.

We had to call a halt. A desolate cliff towered on the right bank of the river. Its outlines were suggestive of the ruins of a castle and its towers. Young birches grew at its foot. The place seemed to be a suitable camp site, and I gave the order to halt.

The men carried fire-wood and the Solon went into the forest in search of uprights for our tents. A minute later I saw him running back. Some hundred paces from the cliff he stopped and looked up, then ran a few paces more, and on returning to our bivouac consulted anxiously with Dersu. The Gold also looked up at the rock, spat vehemently on the ground, and threw down his axe.

Then the two of them begged me to change the site of our encampment. The Solon explained that the devil had thrown stones at him when he was in the act of cutting down a tree at the foot of the cliff. The two of them pleaded so insistently, fright written on their faces, that I gave in and ordered the tents moved about a quarter of a mile down-river. The spot here was even more suitable than the first.

All of us worked with a will. The fire-wood was gathered in no time and a fire was lit. Dersu and the Solon erected a picket. They cut down trees, stuck poles into the ground and propped them up with sticks. They even made use of their blankets.

Dersu explained that the picket was to screen us from the devil's eyes. I was amused, but showed no sign of it, afraid to offend him. The men sat in a row and paid little heed to the Evil One up on the cliff. They were far more absorbed by the thought of food.

The weather deteriorated. The men huddled in the tents and drank hot tea to keep warm. Snow fell about midnight. There was a flash of lightning, followed closely by a thunder-clap.

The thunder-storm, and the attendant snowfall, lasted till two in the morning. The red-hued lightnings came thick and fast. The thunder-claps were like whiplashes, loud and long; we felt the earth shake.

This combination of thunder-storm and snowfall was so novel and unusual a thing to us that we all looked up in surprise. But the sky was black. The flashes of lightning illuminated heavy storm-clouds moving in a southwesterly direction.

One of the thunder-claps was particularly deafening. The lightning had struck somewhere near the rocky mount. A loud noise, that of a landslide, mingled with the crash of thunder. The Solon was scared out of his wits.

He thought the devil, in his anger, was demolishing the cliff.

He lit a second fire and hovered wretchedly behind the picket. I glanced at Dersu. He was confused, surprised, somewhat frightened. The Evil One, who threw stones, and the thunderbolts, the snow, and then the landslide—it was all too much for him. He appeared to see a connection between all these shocking events.

"Enduli* is driving the devil away." He sighed with relief, turning to the Solon.

In the meantime, the fury of the thunder-storm abated, but flashes of lightning cut the sky for hours more, large flares streaking across the horizon, lighting up the outlines of distant peaks and of the rain-clouds shedding rain and sleet. The hollow rumble of far away thunderclaps made the earth shake.

After the evening meal the men turned in. I sat by Dersu's side for some time, listening avidly to his talk about evil spirits and thunder-storms coupled with snowfalls.

"Thunder is Agdy," he was saying. "When the devil stays too long in one place, the god Enduli sends Agdy to chase him away."

According to Dersu a thunder-storm signified the presence of the devil, after whose departure (i. e., after the thunder-storm) there sets in a calm and a quiet. Animals, birds, fishes, even the grass and the insects, all know the devil is gone and are of good cheer. In the past, he said, thunder and lightning came only in summer, and it was only with the coming of Russians that thunder-storms occurred in winter also. The one we experienced that day, was the third in his lifetime.

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* *Enduli*—god of the skies.— *Tr.*

Time went by quickly. Dawn was near. The outlines of wooded mountain-sides, of the Devil's Cliff, and the bushes overhanging the river stepped out of the dark. All signs spoke of foul weather. But suddenly a flush of crimson shot up in the east from beyond the mountains, daubing the frowning sky with a tint of red. Every little bush and twig was distinctly visible in its pink and gold radiance. I gazed reverently at the rich interplay of colours cast by the rising sun.

"About time we went to bed too, old man," I said to my companion. But as I turned, I discovered that Dersu had anticipated me. He was fast asleep, his back against a log.

We awoke late next morning. Storm-clouds crept slowly across the sky, but they did not look half as ominous as they did the night before.

After breakfast we marched up the Takhoba towards the Sikhota-alin. The mountain range was a day's march from our bivouac. By dusk we were near the watershed and encamped for the night in a dense forest.

The sky had cleared and the night gave promise to be cold. I relied for warmth on my blanket and gave up my place by the fire to the Solon, who was lightly dressed. At three in the morning the cold wakened me, and all my efforts to wrap myself tighter in my blanket came to nothing. The frost found its way under it, chilling my shoulders and legs. I got up.

It was dark. Our fire had gone out. I raked up the embers and fanned them. A blaze shot up, illuminating the surroundings. Zakharov and Arinin lay in the shelter of the tent. Dersu slept in his clothes, in a sitting posture.

In gathering fire-wood, I stumbled on the Solon some distance from the fire. He lay on fir twigs, covered only with his threadbare jacket. Afraid that he would catch cold, I took him by the shoulder. The youth slept so soundly that it took some time to shake him out of his dreams. Da-Parl rose, scratched his head, yawned, then lay down again and snored loudly.

I warmed myself a bit by the fire, edged in under the tent between the men, and fell sound asleep.

Next morning we rose early. Our food supplies were at an end and we had to hurry. Our breakfast consisted of fried squirrel's meat, the remainder of a flour cake baked in hot ashes, and hot tea.

When we set out the sun had barely risen. Bright and gay, it climbed from behind the forest, bathing the snow-covered mountain peaks in its vivid warmth. On crossing the ridge, we came to the bank of the Kumuho.

On the last leg of a plotted course the traveller is always spurred on to added effort. From the mouth of the Kumuho we would again go upriver into the mountains, make camp, pitch tents and carry fire-wood; yet there was a sweet allure in the idea of reaching the journey's end. And we all turned in early, so as to make an early start the next day.

At the crack of dawn we were all on our feet and made ready to depart. I took my towel and ran to the river for a dip.

The countryside was in its morning sleep. Cold vapours hung over the river. A prodigious dew fell to earth. Then a faint morning breeze raced through the forest. The fog billowed, opening a view of the opposite bank. Silence reigned at the bivouac. The men were in the midst of their breakfast. Suddenly I heard footsteps on the pebble bank. Turning abruptly, I saw two figures—one tall and the other somewhat shorter. They were elks—a mother and its calf. They stepped to the edge of the river and drank greedily. The mother shook its head, then scratched its flank with its teeth. I gazed admiringly at the stately animals and feared that the men would see them. Suddenly the mother elk sensed danger, cocked its ears, and looked intently in our direction. Water dripped from its lips, causing widening circles on the surface of the river. It came to life, roared hoarsely and dashed towards the forest. A breeze rose at that instant, and the opposite bank vanished from view behind a shroud of fog. Zakharov fired and missed, and in my heart of hearts I was unutterably glad that he did.

At last the sun rose. The fog took on an orange hue. The outlines of bushes, trees and mountains became visible. And within thirty minutes we were walking down the path, chatting merrily.

In a clearing near the sea lived a sectarian Dolganov, who exploited local natives. I had no wish to stop in the house of a man who built his fortune upon the misery of poor people, and we headed directly for the sea. Near the river-mouth we found Hai Pa-tou and his boat. He came to the Kumuho on the same day he left Kusun, and had been waiting for us about a week.

In the evening the men laid large fires. They were in high spirits, much as if celebrating their home-coming. They had grown so accustomed to camp life that they were absolutely oblivious of its hardships. On November 1—the first day of the first winter month—we rested.

# 26. IN THE HEART OF THE USSURI BACKWOODS

We parted with the Solon on the Kumuho.

He turned back to the Takhoba and we resumed our journey north.

The path along the coast broke off on the bank of the Kumuho. From Cape Olympiada to the Samarga River, 93 miles as the crow flies and about 140 miles on foot, the shore is mountainous and absolutely deserted. The mountains are garbed in a velvety cloak of coniferous woods, which stretch to the edge of the sea. The entire stretch is well-nigh impassable. Even the Udeheis avoid it. A distance which a boat covered in half a day, took as much as four days overland.

Hai Pa-tou's boat could enter rivers that had a backwater and no sand-bars. So I ordered him to set out next morning for the Khatokhu and await us there. As for us, we were to march up the Kholonku to the Sikhota-alin, and then go down the Nakhtokhu back to the coast.

I rose earlier than the rest that morning, dressed and went into the open. The rising sun lit up Hai's sails far out at sea. I made tea, roused my companions, and after breakfast we gathered up our knapsacks and set out.

It was getting colder each day. The mean daily temperature dropped to 6.3° C, and the days became markedly shorter. At night we sought protection from the searing wind in the thick of the woods. We needed more fire-wood than usual to keep us warm and called our halts earlier to gather it. Our daily mileage shrank. We now required twice as long for a distance that in summer took us little more than a day.

Having chosen a camp site, I ordered Zakharov and Arinin to pitch the tent, while Dersu and I went hunting. There was a narrow strip of living aspen, alder, cedar, purple willow, birch, maple and larch groves on both sides of the river. We walked and conversed quietly, he in front, and I a few paces in the rear. Suddenly Dersu motioned to me. I thought at first that he was listening to something, but soon saw that he had risen on tiptoe, bending sideways, and was sniffing the air.

"Smell them?" he whispered. "People!"

"What people?" I asked.

"Wild pigs," the Gold replied.

But hard as I tried I smelled nothing. Dersu moved stealthily to the right, stopping frequently, his nose to the wind. We walked thus about a hundred and fifty paces, when something burst out of the thickets quite near us, materializing into a wild pig and a suckling. Several more hogs appeared and scattered in all directions. I bagged the sucking-pig.

On the way back I asked Dersu why he had not shot any pigs himself. He replied that he had not seen them, that he only heard the noise they made rushing through the thickets. The Gold was upset. He cursed aloud and suddenly snatched off his cap and beat his fist against his head. I laughed and said he saw better with his nose than with his eyes. I had no inkling at the time that the little incident served notice of tragic events to come.

The sucking-pig was never more welcome. We gorged ourselves on fresh meat. Our spirits were high. Only Dersu looked dejected. He kept grunting and asked himself aloud again and again how he could have failed to see the hogs.

We marched without a guide, following the landmarks which the Solon had given us. But the mountains and rivers all looked so much alike it was the easiest thing on earth to take the wrong direction. That worried me. Dersu, meanwhile, was totally indifferent to everything. He was accustomed to the forest, and it was all the same to him where we should spend the night—here or somewhere else.

Our ascent began a few yards from the bivouac.From the first summit we climbed, we saw the Pi River valley, and the mountain range beyond it.

A splendid view lay before our eyes from this height. To one side, as far as the eye could see, were mountains. They billowed northwards like giant white-crested waves, fading away into a mist. The Nakhtokhu was to the north-east, and the blue sea away to the south.

The cold, biting wind prevented us from gazing our fill upon the magnificent landscape, driving us down into the valley. With each step there was less and less snow. We were walking over a half-frozen moss carpet. It crunched underfoot, and the imprints of our boots remained deeply imbedded in it.

I was walking in front of our little group, and Dersu followed a close second. Suddenly he overtook me at a run and examined the ground. There were human footprints pointing in the same direction as ours.

"Who passed here?" I asked the Gold.

"Small foot. Not Russian, not Chinese, not Korean," he replied, and added: "Untas, toes pointed up. A man walked here little time ago. I think we soon catch him up."

Other signs, beyond our comprehension, told him the man was an Udehei, that he was a sable-trapper, that he carried a stave, an axe, a sable-net, and that, judging by his gait, he was young. He was making his way straight through the forest, ignoring the thickets and keeping to the clearings. From this Dersu concluded that he was returning from a hunting expedition and, most likely, heading for his bivouac. We decided to follow him there, since it would not take us out of our way.

The forest broke off, giving way to stretches of burnt woodland—the reminders of a forest fire. Suddenly Dersu stopped and said he smelled smoke. In another ten minutes, by the side of a river, we saw a lodge some hundred paces away, and a fire hard by it. A man dashed out of it, rifle in hand. It was Yanseli, an Udehei from the Nakhtokhu River. Back from hunting, he was preparing a meal. His knapsack lay on the ground, and a stave, rifle and axe lay by its side.

I was curious to learn how Dersu knew that Yanseli had also carried a sable-net. He said he had spotted the stump of a cut twig and a broken ring from the net on the ground near by. The twig, he added, was cut to make a new ring. Dersu then asked the Udehei for his sable-net. The latter untied his knapsack in silence and showed it to us. One of its middle rings was new.

Yanseli told us we were near the Dagda River, which flowed towards the Nakhtokhu. We had considerable difficulty in talking him into being our guide. Money held no interest for him. It was the cartridges I promised to give him on reaching the coast that finally induced him to agree.

The last few days were particularly cold. The water along the banks froze over and helped our progress. The creeks were also frozen, and we walked across them to shorten our route, and soon came to the Nakhtokhu.

After midday Yanseli brought us to a path which followed the bank of the river past numerous sable-traps. He said the place belonged to an Udehei by name of Monguli, and that we were likely to meet up with him on our way. And, indeed, we did some two miles farther on. He was bending over one of the traps. On seeing strangers he took fright and was on the point of taking to his heels when he glimpsed Yanseli, whose presence reassured him. As always in encounters of that kind, all of us stopped. The men lighted cigarettes, while Dersu and the Udeheis launched into a discussion.

"What are you talking about?" I asked Dersu.

"Chinese stole a sable," he replied.

According to Monguli, a strange Chinese, passing several days before, had taken a trapped sable and then reset the trap. I ventured the opinion that he might be mistaken, that perhaps no sable had been trapped, but Monguli pointed to some blood-stains, insisting that they were unquestionable proof of his deduction.

"Perhaps it wasn't a sable," I ventured again.

"No," Monguli replied. "When log dropped on it the sable bit the pegs. It left tooth marks."

Then I asked why he suspected the Chinese. The Udehei explained that the thief wore Chinese shoes, and a nail was missing in the left heel. The reasoning was convincing.

It was cold and windy. Ice bridged the river at many points, and we could walk freely from bank to bank.

We came upon three Udehei fanzas. The local Udeheis had built the Chinese-style abodes only recently. Several years before they had lived in yurts. There were vegetable patches alongside each of the huts, cultivated by hired

Chinese labourers. We learned that the Nakhtokhu River was the extreme northern point of Chinese influence. There were only five Chinese there, as a matter of fact, four of whom were permanent residents, and one a recent arrival from the Kusun River.

Our Udehei guides examined his footwear and found a nail missing in his heel. They untied his knapsack, pulled out the stolen sable, and recapitulated his crime in all detail. He thought they had seen him steal it, and confessed to his crime.

The Udeheis carried the matter no farther, and departed, highly pleased with themselves for recovering their property. But the other Chinese had more definite views. They held whispered council and then told the miscreant that he had disgraced them and must leave the Nakhtokhu for good. The man, who stood before them with head uncovered, heard their sentence to the end and promised to leave the valley next day never to return.

The Udeheis had disturbing news for us. Our boat had left the Kholonku on November 4 and had not been heard of since. I recalled that there had been a strong gale that day. One of our friends told us he had seen a boat battling the wind in the open sea, driven farther and farther away from shore.

Our property—warm clothing, footwear, provisions, and all—was aboard the boat. We had with us only what we could carry, such as our light autumn clothing, a pair of untas each, blankets, tents, rifles, cartridges, and a meagre supply of food. I knew there were more Udeheis farther north on the Edin River, but that was far away. Furthermore, they were poor, and we could scarcely expect them to put up all our group.

Our disappointment was mingled with regret for Hai Pa-tou, that fine sailor, who, to all appearances, had found his grave at the bottom of the sea.

We walked on in silence. What were we to do? Our predicament was grave. At last a clearing appeared ahead, the forest ended abruptly, and we sighted the sea.

## 27. THE TESTAMENT

There used to be a lagoon at the mouth of the Nakhtokhu, cut off from the sea by a spit. Now a large swamp took its place, thickly overgrown with ledum and rockroses. The little bay at the mouth of the river was enclosed by several promontories. We made our camp at the foot of these steep coastal slopes.

In the evening Dersu and I held council by the fire. Four days had passed since the boat disappeared. If it had been near, it would have returned. I was for going on to the Amagu River and spending the winter with the local sectarians, but Dersu held other views. He insisted that we should first obtain a sufficient quantity of skins by hunting and make ourselves new fur footwear. He thought we could purchase dried fish and foxtail millet from the natives. But there were other difficulties. It was growing colder each day. In a week or two our light autumn clothing would afford us no protection from the frost. And yet Dersu's project was the more sensible.

After dinner the men turned in. Dersu and I continued our discussion. I toyed with the idea of returning to the Udeheis, but Dersu insisted that we should stay on the coast. Firstly, he said, it was easier getting provisions where we were, and, secondly, he had not abandoned hope of Hai Pa-tou's return. If Hai was alive, he would not fail to come back and look for us along the shore. Dersu's reasoning was sound. Glum thoughts crowded in my head, giving me no rest. To return empty-handed was mortifying. On the other hand, it was much too imprudent to set out on a winter march unequipped.

The men, told that we were likely to stay on the spot the whole winter, fetched flotsam thrown ashore by the waves, and built a dugout. That was a splendid idea. They made stone stoves and erected a Korean-style chimney out of a hollow tree-trunk. The entrance was curtained off with tenting and the roof laid with moss and turf. A carpet of dry grass and spruce twigs was strewn on the floor. Our new quarters, I saw, would be fairly comfortable.

Next day Dersu and I set out due south along the shore to see if there was any sign of Hai Pa-tou. On the way we planned to do a bit of hunting. We wondered what had become of Hai. That question had troubled us all along, and each time we came back to the conclusion that we had to make ourselves fur shoes and set out to the Amagu sectarians.

My dog Alpa ran some hundred paces ahead of us. I saw suddenly that another living being had joined it—an animal much like a dog but with a darker fur, short-legged and shaggy. It was running along the edge of the shore line precipices, making clumsy, ungainly leaps, intent on overtaking Alpa. Drawing level with my dog, the shaggy animal assumed a defensive posture. I recognized a glutton, the largest of the family Mustelidae.

The glutton dwells in mountain forests, where it hunts musk-deer and roe. It sits motionless for hours on a tree or rock along the deer paths, waiting for prey. It knows the nature of its victims in minutest detail, their favourite routes and habits. It knows well, for instance, that in deep snow the musk-deer runs round in a circle to spare itself the trouble of trampling down new paths. On scaring up a deer, therefore, the glutton pursues it until its victim completes a circle. Thereupon the glutton clambers up a tree in its path and waits for the deer to reappear. If its strategy fails, it exhausts the deer, pursuing it until it drops. While in pursuit, it pays no heed to other deer that may appear, continuing after its original victim even when the latter is out of eyeshot.

Alpa stopped and gazed curiously at the stranger. I was on the point of firing, but Dersu stopped me, saying that we had to use our cartridges sparingly. He was right. I called back Alpa. The glutton took to its heels and went to cover in one of the ravines.

After picking a spot for our bivouac we went off in different directions. There was not much time left to hunt. When we returned the day was on the wane. The sun was sinking slowly behind the mountains, its rays creeping into the heart of the forest, lighting up the trunks of the poplars, the pointed tops of the spruces, and the shaggy caps of the cedars. A piercing cry resounded in the stillness.

"Musk-deer," Dersu whispered.

Some minutes later I saw an animal much like a roe, only shorter and with a darker fur. Two pointed fangs projected downwards from its mouth. It ran about a hundred paces, stopped, turning its graceful head in our direction.

"Where is she?" Dersu asked.

I pointed my hand at it.

"Where?" he asked again.

I directed his gaze by pointing to conspicuous landmarks, but all my efforts failed. He could not see the deer. Then he raised his gun cautiously, looked again closely at the spot where the animal stood, fired, and missed. The report rolled through the forest and died out in the distance. The frightened deer bolted into the thickets.

"I hit it?" Dersu asked me, and I realized that he had not even seen the effect of his shot.

"You missed," I replied. "The deer has made off."

"Did I?" he asked in a frightened voice.

We came to the spot where the deer had stood a few minutes before. There were no blood-stains on the ground. I spoke a few teasing words, and Dersu sank to earth, put his rifle in his lap, and gazed emptily into space. Suddenly he jumped to his feet, made a large mark upon the trunk of a near-by tree with his knife, snatched up his gun, and ran some hundred and fifty paces away. I thought he wanted to prove that his miss had been an accident. But the mark on the tree was badly visible at that distance and he had to retrace his steps. At last he selected a spot, put his rifle on the musket-rest, and took aim. He aimed long, raised his eyes from the sights twice, and hesitated to pull the trigger. Finally he fired and ran to the tree. I could see by the way his arms fell limply at his sides that he had missed again. When I came up to him his cap and rifle were lying on the ground, his wide-open eyes fixed emptily into space. I touched his shoulder. Dersu started and began to speak. He spoke rapidly:

"Before nobody find animal first. Only I. I shoot—always make hole in him. My bullet never miss. Now I am fifty-eight. My eye is no good. Cannot see. Shoot deer—miss. Shoot tree—also miss. I do not want to work for Chinese—don't understand their work. What I do now?"

I realized how ill-timed my jokes had been. To him, a backwoodsman who made his living by hunting, bad eyesight was tantamount to death. It was all the more tragic, since Dersu was alone in the world. Where would he go? What should he do? Where could he rest his weary grey head?

I felt sorry for him.

"Never you mind," I said. "You've been a great help to me, got me out of trouble so many times. I owe you a lot. You will always be welcome in my house. We'll live together."

Dersu began fussing about with his things. He picked up his rifle and looked at it, as if it were a thing he had no use for any longer.

We separated near the river. Dersu returned to the bivouac while I stayed on, hoping to bag some game. I roamed through the forest for a long time, but saw nothing. At last, played out, I turned back.

Suddenly something stirred in the bushes. I stopped dead and readied my gun. There was another faint rustle, and a roe stepped timorously from the alder-trees. It nibbled daintily at the grass and was apparently unaware of my presence. I aimed quickly and fired. The wretched animal leaped forward and then bit the dust. A minute later it was dead. I tied its legs together with my belt and swung it over my shoulders. Something warm trickled down my neck. It was blood. I dropped my burden then and began to shout. Soon Dersu's reply echoed through the forest. He came without his gun, and the two of us carried off our trophy slung over a pole.

I was fagged out after the hunt. During supper I was telling Dersu about Russia, suggested that he should give up his vagabond's life in the taiga, where dangers and hardships lurked at every step, and settle with me in the city, but he was silent as before, wrapped in thought.

Then I went to sleep. In the middle of the night I woke up. The moon was high. Nature seemed to have sunk into a languid slumber. There is nothing more fascinating to the eye than the boundless expanse of sea bathed in moonlight and a deep sky studded with placid, sparkling stars. The sombre waters, the largeness of the cliffs along the shore, and the silent forest in the hills offered a spectacle of harmony and inexpressible beauty.

Dersu was sitting by the fire. I saw that he had not slept. He was glad that I awoke, and put the tea-kettle on the fire. He was excited and ministered to my comforts, just so I should not settle back to sleep. I yielded to his wish and said that all sleep had gone from me. He put a few logs in the fire and, when it burned brightly, rose and spoke in festive tones.

"Captain!" he exclaimed. "I speak now. You must listen."

He told me how he had lived before, how he was left alone in the world, and how he had made his living by hunting. His gun had always been a faithful friend. He sold antlers and bought cartridges, tobacco and clothing from the Chinese. He never thought his eyes would fail him. But for more than six months he had been awakening to that fact. He had hoped his eyesight would recover, but that day he became convinced that his hunting days were over. This made him panicky. Then he spoke of what I had said about him finding shelter and food under my roof.

"Thanks, captain," he concluded. "Much thanks."

And suddenly he dropped to his knees and bowed his head to the ground. I hastened to pick him up and said that it was I who owed my life to him, and if only he would consent to live with me I would be glad to have him. To distract him, I proposed to have tea.

"Wait, captain," Dersu intervened, "I must speak more."

He said that while a young man he had learnt the art of ginseng hunting from a Chinese friend. He had never sold ginseng roots and had replanted them in the upper reaches of the Lefu. He had last visited his plantation some fifteen years before. The plants were fine. There were twenty-two in all. He had no idea whether they had survived, but expected that they had, because he had picked a lonely spot where no human had ever set foot before.

"It is all for you," he concluded.

That took me by surprise. I tried talking him into selling the roots to Chinese traders and taking the money for himself, but Dersu insisted.

"I don't need them," he said. "I shall not live long. Soon die. I want to give the ginseng to you."

He looked at me pleadingly, and I could resist no longer. My refusal would have offended him. I accepted his gift but made him promise to come with me to Khabarovsk. He did.

In spring, we decided we should go to the Lefu in search of the valuable roots.

Dersu threw a few more logs into the fire. A bright quivering flame shot up, illuminating the near-by shrubs and cliffs, those silent witnesses to our agreement.

A pink fringe appeared in the east. Day was dawning. The red embers of our fire lost brilliance under their blanket of ashes, sending up billows of smoke. It seemed the flames were withdrawing into their innermost core.

"Let's get a little sleep," I suggested. He got up and tidied up the tent. We lay down and dropped off instantly into deep slumber.

When we awoke the sun stood high. The morning was bitterly cold and clear. Patches of unfrozen water stood out dark against the thin sparkling sheet of ice covering the pools.

We had a quick snack of cold meat, washed it down with tea, and, gathering up our knapsacks, set out on our return journey to the Nakhtokhu.

The rest of our company was waiting for us impatiently. Arinin had shot a sea-lion, and Zakharov a seal. We had a substantial supply of skin now, and an abundance of meat.

We did not strike camp for four days—November 12 to 16. During this time the men gathered a supply of red bilberries and pine kernels. Dersu traded the two raw skins for one tanned elk hide with the Udeheis, and had the native women cut untas for us. We sewed them ourselves, each to his own size.

On November 17 we left the Nakhtokhu early in the morning, making our way back to the sectarians. As we were leaving, I scanned the horizon again in the vain hope of glimpsing Hai Pa-tou's sail. The sea was deserted. The wind was blowing from the land, the water near the shore was placid, but in the distance I could see large waves roll. I waved my hand, giving the signal to start. It went against my grain to be turning back, but we had no other choice.

Our return trip passed without incidents, and in the morning of November 23 we came to the Kusun.

## 28. WINTER MARCH

The weather was quickly deteriorating since the day before. Clouds crowded the sky. It began snowing at 10 o'clock in the morning, and snowed several hours running.

After a brief halt with the natives on the Kusun I was intent on marching on, but they advised me to stay another day. The Udeheis said we should expect a gale after so many days of calm. The local Chinese were also alarmed. They kept looking west. I asked them what they feared, and they pointed to the snow-capped peaks of the Kyamo Range.

Only then did I notice that the crest of the ridge, clearly visible before, was indistinct and dim to the eye. It was as though the mountains were smoking.

The Chinese were tying the roofs of their fanzas to adjacent trees and tree-stumps and covered their stacks of grain with grass nets.

The wind, timid at first, kept gathering strength. It carried a kind of bleak haze with it. The whirlwind raised clouds of snow, and dust, and dry leaves. Towards evening the gale attained a high velocity. I went into the open with my wind gauge, but a gust of wind broke its wheel and all but hurled me to earth. I saw from the corner of my eye how a board and pieces of bark, torn off one of the roofs, hurtled through the air. The wind drove a two-wheeled Chinese cart across the yard and dashed it against the fence. One of the haystacks, badly tied down, melted into thin air.

Towards morning the wind abated somewhat. Powerful gusts alternated with periods of calm. When it grew light I could scarcely recognize the place: one fanza was altogether demolished, in another a wall had caved in, and uprooted trees lay in dozens on the cold earth.

We should have set out then, but something held me back. My companions were all tired, and our Chinese hosts so hospitable. We decided to stay another day, and a good thing we did, for a young Udehei came post-haste from the coast to bring us happy tidings. Hai Pa-tou had returned, and all our property was intact. My companions were jubilant, shaking hands happily.

As for me, I was ready to dance with joy.

Next day at the crack of dawn we were all assembled on the coast. Hai Pa-tou was no less pleased than we. A gale had surprised him near the Kangchiu River and had driven him to the Sakhalin shore. He had kept his head and did his best to stay close to the shore, knowing full well that if he failed he would be driven to Japan. From Sakhalin he sailed to the mainland and then descended south along the coast. On reaching the mouth of the Nakhtokhu he learned from the Udeheis that we had started for the Amagu, and set sail in pursuit. He had ridden out the storm of the day before on the Kholonku River and then covered the distance to the Kusun in a single day.

A new plan instantly took shape in my head: I decided to go up the Kusun to the Sikhota-alin and cross to the Bikin. Provisions, tools, warm clothing, footwear, equipment and cartridges—we had all that now.

Hai Pa-tou decided to spend the winter on the Kusun. Sea navigation had become hazardous. Ice-floes appeared along the coast. The mouths of rivers were freezing over.

My men lost no time in unloading the boat. Then they dismantled its masts, rudder and sails, pulled the hull ashore, and placed it on wooden rollers, which they secured with pegs.

Next day we began building nartas.* We had obtained three from the natives, but were still short of three. Zakharov and Arinin knew a bit of carpentering. Two Udeheis volunteered to help. Dersu superintended. His suggestions were always sound. The men knew it and did nothing without first getting his approval.

In ten days the nartas were ready. We had made friends with the Kusun Udeheis and knew all of them by name.

On November 25 Dersu, Arinin and I joined the natives in a fishing expedition to the mouth of the Kusun. The Udeheis took along reed torches and heavy wooden rattles. Between the creeks, on one of the islands, overgrown with aspen, alder and willow-trees, we came upon strange grass-covered structures. I recognized them at once as the handiwork of Japanese fishermen. The fisheries were cunningly hidden from sight and could not be detected either from the land or the sea. We made ourselves at home in one of the huts.

The backwater was frozen solid. The ice was as smooth as a mirror, pure and transparent. We could see the shallows through it, and the deep spots, the seaweeds, stones, and the flotsam. The Udeheis hacked several holes in the ice and dropped a double net into the water. At dusk they lit their torches and ran in the direction of the holes, making an unholy din with their rattles. Terrified by the light and noise, the fish shuttled about like mad, getting caught in the net. The catch was splendid. The

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* *Narta*—a light variety of sledge with runners curving upwards fore and aft, so that they can slide smoothly over fallen snow-covered trees.—*Tr.*

Udeheis repeated the procedure, running towards the holes from the opposite direction, and then moved to the lake, where they did everything over again with similar results.

At ten we had had enough. Some of the natives trekked back home, others remained behind. Logada, an Udehei I knew from the year before, was among the latter. The night was bitterly cold and windy. It was cold even by the fire. Around midnight I missed Logada and asked where he was. One of his compatriots said he was sleeping in the open. I dressed and left the lodge. It was pitch-dark and the raw wind bit my face. I walked up and down the river-bank and, on returning, said that I had failed to find Logada's fire. The Udeheis replied that Logada had not made one.

I was amazed.

"No fire," they repeated indifferently, shrugging their shoulders.

Afraid that some mishap might befall my Udehei friend I lit my little torch and went in search of him. Two Udeheis came along. On the bank, some fifty paces from our hut, we found Logada sleeping on a pile of dry grass. There was hoar-frost in his hair, and a similar film of white covered his back. I shook him vigorously by the shoulder. He rose to his feet and plucked hoar-frost out of his eye-lashes. He was not shivering. Clearly, he was not even chilled.

"Not cold, are you?" I asked, amazed.

"No," he replied, and wanted to know if anything had happened.

The Udeheis told him I had looked for him in the dark. He explained that the hut was crowded and he had decided to sleep in the open. He pulled his jacket tightly about his body, lay down again, and went back to sleep. I returned to the hut and related the whole thing to Dersu.

"Never mind, captain," the Gold said. "These people not afraid of cold. He always live in mountains, catch sables. He sleep anywhere. Always bask his back in the moonlight."

At dawn the Udeheis resumed their fishing. They adopted new tactics this time. A small leather tent was pitched over the hole in the ice, screening it from light. The sun's rays, penetrating the ice, illuminated the bottom of the river. We could clearly see the pebbles, shells, sand, and weeds. The fish-spear, lowered into the water, was just a bit short of the bottom. There were four holes, all close to each other, and four tents were pitched over them. There was a fisherman in each. The others went off in different directions and drove the fish slowly towards the tents. As the fish approached the holes, the fishermen speared it with their harpoons. The spoils were even more plentiful than the night before.

In the afternoon of December 4 we packed our things on the nartas. Next morning we had only to gather up our bedding and have our tea. The Chinese came out to see us off with flags, rattles and fire-crackers.

The river was covered with a solid ice crust. Our train consisted of eight nartas, each weighing over 200 lbs. There were no dogs to be had and we drew the sledges ourselves.

The weather was favourable. The nartas slid lightly along the ice. The men were in high spirits, and we soon came to the mouth of the Buy River, known also by its Chinese name of Wulenhou. Here we struck away from the Kusun towards the Sikhota-alin.

On the Wulenhou we met Suntsai, an Udehei, known far and wide as a fine hunter and a skilled and fearless navigator of the river rapids. He readily agreed to guide us to the Sikhota-alin, provided I waited a day for him. He said he would first have to fit his brother out for a hunting expedition, and then prepare for the long march himself.

In the evening he treated us to fish shavings. A whole frozen lenok was served, which is somewhat smaller in size than a grilse. We shed off our European prejudices against raw fish, and did justice to the Udehei feast.

The next four days (December 9 to 12) we marched up the Wulenhou. The river rises in the Sikhota-alin and flows south-east. Recurrent fires had stripped the mountain-sides of timber. Narrow strips of woodland remained only along both banks of the river and on the islands between the creeks.

Judging by the frozen creeks it would seem the Wulenhou was deep even in summer. But that was not so. The water, running down the hills, flowed away rapidly. It was a different story in winter, however. Water then filled the pits, holes and creeks, and froze over. Fresh layers of ice appeared over the original layer, crust upon crust. That made our progress easier. In the case of larger rivers wind-fallen trees are carried away by the stream, while in the smaller ones they remain where they fall. Knowing this we had taken along several axes and two cross-saws to cut our way through the frequent pile-ups.

The nearer we approached the mountain pass the more ice there was. Vapours hung over new layers of it, and we had to climb hillsides to skirt them. That took time and effort. We were afraid of getting our feet wet. The Udehei footwear of lynx skin and catgut, we found, was a blessing.

A minor incident held us up a whole day. We did not notice how water inundated our bivouac overnight. One of the nartas was ice-locked. We had to chop it out with axes, then melt the ice on its runners over the fire, and repair the damage. It was a lesson to us, after which we always put the nartas on wooden blocks for the night.

Each day progress was becoming more difficult. We entered dense forest land and stone fields littered with fallen timber. Dersu and Suntsai marched in advance with axes in their hands. They cut down shrubs and trees to clear the way for the nartas, and laid brushwood along the edges of pits and hillsides wherever the sledges were liable to topple over.

The farther we penetrated into the mountains, the more snow there was. Charred tree-trunks minus bark and branches stretched far into the distance whichever way we turned. It was a cheerless spectacle. Not a footprint anywhere, not a single bird.

Suntsai, Dersu and I walked ahead. The men trailed behind. We could hear their voices. I stopped at one spot to examine the rock jutting out of the snow. A few minutes later, hurrying after my companions, I saw them bending low, examining something at their feet.

"What is it?" I asked Suntsai.

"Chinese man pass here three days before," Dersu replied. "We find his track."

The barely visible footprints were almost entirely obliterated by the freshly-fallen snow. Dersu and Suntsai noted yet another detail. The track was erratic, running in zigzags; the traveller stumbled and fell frequently, and two of his bivouacs were close to one another.

"Sick," they decided.

We walked faster.

The footprints followed the river. We saw the Chinese was conserving his strength, avoiding fallen trees. In another thirty minutes the tracks veered sharply off the path. We followed them. Two crows rose from a neighbouring tree.

"A-ah," Dersu said and stopped. "Man have die."

We came upon the Chinese some fifty paces away from the bank. He sat on the earth, leaning against a tree, his right elbow resting on a stone, his head bent. A crow perched on his right shoulder. On seeing us, it rose into the air.

The dead man's eyes were open and powdered with snow. The Chinese had obviously wanted to make camp. He had thrown down his knapsack and was in the act of pitching a tent when his strength deserted him and he sat down under the tree. That was where he died. Suntsai and Dersu stayed behind to bury him. We went on.

We walked hard all day, not even stopping for our midday meal. Fallen timber, ice crusts, swamps, and snow-covered pits between the rocks created irksome obstacles. In eight hours we advanced no more than 3 miles — an average of about 600 yards per hour. By evening we came to the crest of the Sikhota-alin. The barometer showed 2,200 feet.

Next day, December 14, the morning was placid and cold. The sun rose red and gave off little warmth. The snow on the mountain peaks was a pale pink, with a bluish tint in the shade.

Vapour rose in billows from the ground, and I called Dersu and Suntsai to go and see why. It was a chalybeate spring. The rock around it was red; the sediments were white and calciferous. Water temperature was 27°C above zero. The Udeheis had known about the warm spring for long as the favourite haunt of elks, but they concealed it doggedly from the Russian settlers.

Everything round the spring was covered with hoar-frost from the warm vapours. The stones and willow bushes, and the dead-wood on the earth, were all covered with bizarre designs, sparkling like diamonds in the sun. To my regret I could not take along any of the spring water to be chemically tested, owing to the cold.

While we were visiting the spring the men had broken camp. We first ascended the Sikhota-alin with the packs, and then returned for the empty nartas.

The eastern slope of the Sikhota-alin is entirely bare. There is scarcely another spot as dour and uninviting. It is hard to believe that a living forest stood here in the past. Few trees have remained. Suntsai said numerous elks had once inhabited these parts, and that the name of the river, Buy, has come from them, being the vernacular for elk. But ever since the forest fires, he said, the animals migrated and the Wulenhou valley turned into a desert.

The sun had travelled most of its daily path across the sky before the men dragged up the last of the nartas to the summit. We put our things on them and pushed off.

The trees round us were small and aged. It was difficult to pick a suitable camp site. Stones were wedged in between the roots, and there was dead-wood, hidden from the eye under a layer of moss. It was ever more difficult to find fire-wood. That may surprise the townsman. Where, if not in a forest, is fire-wood to be had, after all. And yet it was so. The spruce, fir and larch emit sparks in burning. The tents are liable to catch fire. The alder, meanwhile, is a damp kind of tree, and does little more than smoke. There is only the birch, a rare species in the coniferous woodlands of the Sikhota-alin. But Suntsai, who knew these parts well, soon found everything we needed for a comfortable camp site, and I signalled a halt.

The men began pitching tents, while Dersu and I, hoping to bag an elk, went off in search of game. At a close distance from the bivouac I spotted three hazel-hens. They strutted about in the snow, paying no attention to us. I was on the point of shooting, when Dersu stopped me.

"No need, no need," he said hastily. "Can take them barehanded."

I was surprised to see him walk boldly up to the birds, and even more surprised to see that the birds showed no alarm and skipped away unhurriedly like domestic hens. We were no more than a dozen feet from them. Dersu took out his knife and cut down a young spruce, paying little heed to the birds, cleared it of twigs, and tied a loop to its end. Then he walked up to the birds and threw the loop over the head of one of the hazel-hens. The trapped bird flapped its wings in alarm, and its two companions, finally conscious of danger, took wing and perched upon a near-by larch—one of them on the lowest branch, and the other in the tree-top. I thought the birds would now be on their guard, and meant to fire at them, but Dersu stopped me again, saying that to catch them up in the tree was even easier. He approached the larch and raised his pole noiselessly. In putting the loop over the lower bird he chanced to touch its beak, but it only shook its silly head and again stared in our direction. A minute later it was struggling helplessly on the ground. The third bird was out of the pole's reach. Dersu climbed the tree. The larch was thin and swayed from side to side, but the bird paid little heed even then. It clung to the branch, balancing on its swaying perch. Dersu flung the loop over it and dragged it down. Thus, we caught all three birds without a single shot. I noted that they were larger than the ordinary hazel-hen, and had a darker plumage, while the male had red eyebrows, like the heath-cock. It was a black grouse, or "dikushka," which, in the Ussuri Territory, inhabits the coniferous forests of the Sikhota-alin southwards to the source of the Armu. But the bird scarcely justified its name of "dikushka" (the Russian for shyer), given to it by the sectarians, unless they christened it that way because it dwells in remote, deserted spots. I investigated its crop and found that it fed on pine-needles and bilberries.

It was dark when we returned to our camp. A fire burned merrily inside the tent, looking much like a large lantern. The smoke and steam, lit up brightly by the flames, rose to the sky in thick billows.

In the evening we celebrated our crossing over the Sikhota-alin. We had the hens for dinner, boiled some chocolate, had tea and rum, and before turning in I told the men one of Gogol's frightening tales.

It did not take us long next morning to realize that now the Sikhota-alin stood between us and the sea. At dawn the thermometer showed 20° C below zero. And the farther behind we left the Sikhota-alin, the colder it became. On the coast it is often warmer up in the mountains than in the valleys. In marching away from the sea we had apparently come to a "lake of cold air," which filled the Ussuri valley. Whirls of snow danced upon the river; they sprang up suddenly, of one accord, all speeding in the same direction, and melted into thin air just as suddenly.

Progress against the biting wind was painful. We made frequent stops and warmed ourselves by the fire. Towards the end of the day we had made a mere six miles.

We finally reached the Bikin on December 20, after five days of marching. From here it was about 220 miles to the railway.

At dusk we came to an Udehei encampment. The natives were terrified when we appeared from somewhere "up above," but when they learned that Dersu was among us, they set their minds at rest and became hospitable. We did not pitch our tents, and found shelter in their yurts.

It was two weeks since we had entered the taiga. The longing with which the men spoke of inhabited places told me it was high time to call a day's halt. The men made themselves comfortable in the yurts. All the toils of camping were abandoned. There was no need to cut pine twigs, no need to gather fire-wood, etc. They pulled off their boots and prepared the evening meal.

Before nightfall some Udehei youths returned from a hunting expedition and announced that they had spotted the tracks of wild pigs, and that they would stage a battue the next day. The chase promised to be interesting, and I decided to join them.

The Udeheis prepared for the battue in good time. They inspected the straps of their skis and sharpened their spears. The hunt was to begin before dawn, and everybody turned in early. It was still dark when I was shaken out of my sleep. A bright fire burned in the yurt. The Udeheis were ready to set out. I dressed quickly, put two pieces of dry bread in my pocket, and stepped out into the open.

The Udeheis went ahead. I followed. Some way up the river they turned, scaled a mountain, and from there descended into a neighbouring ravine. After a brief discussion they went on, but now they were on the alert. All conversation ceased.

Thirty minutes later it was light. The sun's rays, lighting up the mountain peaks, informed the denizens of the forest that day had come. By that time we had reached the spot where the day before the youths had discovered boar tracks.

In summer wild pigs rest in the day-time and feed at night. In winter they do the very opposite. The pigs sighted the day before could not, therefore, have gone far.

The chase began.

It was a veritable revelation to see how swiftly Udeheis travel on skis through the taiga. Soon I dropped back, and then lost sight of them altogether. There was no sense in trying to run after them, and I just followed in their tracks unhurriedly. After half an hour of walking, I sat down to rest.

Suddenly I heard a noise at my back. Two boars trotted out of the thickets across my path. I shot and missed. The frightened animals dashed away. There were no bloodstains on their trail, and I decided to pursue them. I caught up with them in about fifteen minutes. They were obviously tired and jogged along laboriously through the deep snow. Suddenly the animals sensed danger and turned their heads in my direction. I perceived by the way they moved their jaws and by the sounds that reached me that they were whetting their fangs. Their eyes burned, their nostrils were dilated, and their ears cocked. Had it been one boar I should, most likely, have risked a shot. But they were two. I would undoubtedly be attacked. So I withheld fire and decided to wait for another, more propitious opportunity. The boars soon stopped whetting their fangs. They raised high their snouts and sniffed the air. Then, relaxing, they turned slowly and walked on. I made a circuit and soon was again in line with them. They stopped again. One of them tore at the bark on a fallen tree-trunk with its fangs. Then they froze in an alert position, emitted a curt roar, and bolted to the left of me. At that instant I glimpsed four Udeheis, and saw by their expressions that they had spotted the boars. Joining them, I closed up their rear. The wild pigs could not go far. They stopped and prepared to sell their lives dearly. The Udeheis formed something of a circle round them and then began their advance. At bay, the boars turned one way and then another. Finally they made a break to the right. The Udeheis handled their spears with astounding alacrity. One boar was struck under the shoulder-blade, the other in the neck. The latter tried to dash on. A young hunter tried holding it down with his spear, but it snapped like a matchstick. The Udehei lost his balance and fell. The pig rushed in my direction. I raised my gun instinctively and fired almost point-blank. Happily, the bullet struck the beast in the head. The Udehei, whose spear was broken, was sitting in the snow and holding his hands to a leg wound, which was bleeding profusely. The boar had grazed him with its sharp fangs. I bandaged the wound, while the Udeheis quickly made a bivouac and gathered fire-wood. One of them stayed with the wounded hunter, another went to fetch a narta, while the rest continued the chase.

The hunter's wound caused little alarm in the settlement. His wife wisecracked at his expense. Injuries of that kind were so frequent that no one paid any attention to them. The body of every male bore the marks of boar's fangs or the claws of a bear.

That day the men repaired our nartas and the Udehei women mended our untas and clothing. To make things easier for us, I hired two men with dog-drawn nartas to accompany us to the next nomad camp.

In the morning I let the guides go. An amusing episode ensued. I gave them each ten rubles—a ten-ruble note to one, and two five-ruble notes to the other. The first was offended. I thought he was dissatisfied with the sum and pointed to his companion, who seemed well pleased. But it was something quite different that bothered him. He was offended that I had given him but one note, whereas his companion received two. I forgot that the natives were unfamiliar with money. Wishing to please the man I gave him three three-ruble notes and one ruble note in exchange for the single ten-ruble one. It was the other's turn to be offended then, and to settle the affair I had to give both of them notes of equal denomination. It was a sight for sore eyes to see the expression of pleasure in their faces as they set out on their return journey.

## 29. NARROW ESCAPE

After the day's rest the men were in high spirits. They put their best leg foremost, joking and laughing, and made about eleven miles that day. We called a halt at a fanza occupied by two hospitable old men—a Chinese sable-trapper and an Udehei.

I wanted to scale the Khorsky Pass and asked them about the way there. Kitenbu, the Udehei, agreed to guide us. He was about sixty, with a touch of grey in his hair, and a face wrinkled with age.

Kitenbu lost no time in preparing for the ascent. He took along a time-worn blanket, a goatskin and an old, much-repaired blunderbuss. I took a tea-kettle, a notebook and a sleeping-bag, while Dersu equipped himself with a tent, his pipe, and some food supplies.

My dog Alpa, and Kada, the Udehei's dog—a grey, sharp-nosed little tike with pricked-up ears—came with us.

The morning was fine. We expected to reach the hunting lodge on the other side of the watershed that day, but our plan was destined to fail. After midday clouds gathered overhead, circles appeared round the sun, and a wind rose. I was on the point of turning back, but Dersu allayed my fears; he said there would be no snow-storm, just a gale that would subside before the next day. He turned out to be right. The sun disappeared from view at about four in the afternoon, and there was no telling what shrouded it—clouds or fog. Dry snow dust hung in the air.

The biting wind cut our faces. At dusk we arrived at the watershed. Dersu and the Udehei put their heads together. The old man, it developed, had gone somewhat off the route. Afraid to lose his way, he advised us to spend the night in the open.

"Today we won't find the fanza," Dersu informed me. "Must camp outside."

"Very well," I said, "let's pick a good spot."

We sought shelter from the wind in the thick of a cedar grove, and encamped at the foot of a giant 60-foot cedar.

Dersu went off for fire-wood. The old Udehei cut twigs for our bedding, and I made the fire.

We were done with all these camp errands close on seven o'clock, and were very nearly played out. As the flames of our fire shot up, however, things picked up. We dried our clothing and made dinner. The tea was ready in half an hour. Our conversation revolved about the weather.

My Alpa was not as well equipped with fur as Kada. She froze bitterly and sat by the fire, pretty much fatigued, dozing and squinting her eyes. The Udehei dog, meanwhile, accustomed as it was since a puppy to all kinds of hardships, paid little attention to the discomforts of camp life. It curled up close to us and slept. A film of snow covered it after a time. It rose to its feet, shook the snow off, strutted about a bit, lay down on its other side, and stuck its nose under its belly, warming itself with its own breath.

Dersu was always sorry for Alpa and would make her a bed of twigs and dry grass before taking his boots off. And whenever neither was available, he would give up his jacket to the dog. Alpa knew it. She would hang about Dersu during our halts, touching him with her paws and jumping round him to attract his attention. No sooner did Dersu take up his axe, however, than she composed herself and waited patiently for his return with a handful of twigs.

We were no less tired than the dogs this time and, on adding more wood to the fire, made ready to turn in. Each made his own bed. I slept on the lee side of the fire, and Dersu slept next to me.

He had erected something of a tent for himself, and covered his shoulders with his greatcoat. The old Udehei lay at the foot of the cedar, under his blanket. He volunteered to tend the fire that night. I cut a lot of twigs, and spread my sleeping-bag over them. My bed was comfortable, and I was well protected from the cold wind on one side by a fallen tree and on the other by the fire.

On a stormy night a forest is always an eerie place to be in. There is the impression that the nearest tree will crash down on you, and in spite of my fatigue I lay awake a long time.

The wind was blowing furiously. It hurled itself upon everything in its way like a maddened beast. The trees took the brunt of it. A veritable battle of forest giants with the elements was at its height. The wind attacked in gusts, tore at them, and rushed by, howling and snarling. I had the sensation of being in the very centre of a monstrous whirlwind. The gale seemed to describe a large circle, returning to our bivouac and again attacking the cedar-tree, doing its worst to uproot it. But its manoeuvres failed.

The forest giant only frowned and swayed from side to side. The blizzard on Lake Hanka, and that on the Sikhota-alin, came back to my mind. I heard the Udehei putting logs into the fire, and then the roar of the flames fanned by the wind. Then it all mixed in my head, and I fell asleep. At midnight I woke up. Dersu and Kitenbu were awake, conversing. I divined by the tone of their voices that they were alarmed.

"The cedar is about to fall," I thought, throwing the cover of the sleeping-bag off my head and sitting up.

"Never mind, never mind, captain," Dersu said reassuringly, but there was an untrue ring in his voice. He just did not want to alarm me.

The fire burned brightly. Dersu sat by it and, shielding his face from the heat with one hand, put the logs straight with the other, raking the coals into a single heap. Old Kitenbu was stroking his dog. Alpa sat by my side, shivering from cold.

It seemed all the evil spirits were chasing one another through the taiga, whining and howling, intent on upsetting the natural order of things and turning the earth back to chaos and destruction. There was frenzied whining, then wild laughter and ululation. A moment of silence would follow, in which we made out what went on about us. These little intervals in the general turmoil foretold that the wind would soon drop.

Black and red shadows flitted over the earth alternately from the bright flames of our fire. Hard by the fire one minute, they would retreat the next, leaping over bushes and snow-drifts.

"Nothing, captain," Dersu repeated insistently. "You can sleep. We just talk."

I needed no second bidding, pulled my head in under the flap, and was soon asleep. Some time later I was awakened again by the sound of voices.

"Something's wrong," I thought, and crawled out of the sleeping-bag.

The storm was dying down. Stars appeared here and there. Each gust of wind swept dry snow along the ground with a noise suggestive of sand. I saw my companions by the fire. Kitenbu was on his feet, listening intently. Dersu stood a few paces away, screening his eyes from the fire and peering anxiously into the dark. The dogs were also awake; they crowded close to the fire, on the point of lying down, but rising to their legs each time and moving to a new spot. They sensed something in the air and were looking the same way as Dersu and the Udehei.

The fire was a raging blaze, sending up thousands of sparks, which whirled in the air, and were carried away by the wind into the forest.

"What is it, Dersu?" I asked.

"Boars," he replied.

"What of it?"

Boars in the forest—nothing unnatural in that, I thought. The animals had been on the go, stumbled upon our bivouac, and were now noisily expressing their displeasure.

Dersu made an impatient gesture.

"You travel so much in the taiga, yet you don't understand. In winter boars never walk at night."

We heard the sound of snapping twigs and the typical "sneezing" of wild pigs. A close distance from our camp the boars were descending the crest and detouring a conical mountain peak.

There was no more sleep in me.

"Why are they on the move?" I asked.

"Must be some reason," Dersu replied. "Some people pursue them."

I thought for a minute that he meant the Udeheis, surprised that they should pick such a time for a boar hunt. Then I recalled that Dersu often referred to animals as "people" and it dawned on me that the boars were being pursued by a tiger. The king of the taiga was somewhere near.

The storm had subsided. But judging by the swaying trees, the wind was still up to its tricks up above among the tree-tops.

I dragged my bag closer to the fire and crawled back into it. In a minute I was asleep. It seems I slept a long time. Something heavy suddenly dropped on my chest, the whining of a dog burst upon my ears, and then Dersu's desperate shout:

"Quick!"

I threw off my hood. Snow and dry leaves fluttered in my face. That same instant I glimpsed a lithe shadow shoot sideways towards the trees. Alpa lay trembling on my chest.

The fire was practically dead; only two or three embers were still glowing. The wind fanned them to a bright red and scattered their sparks over the snow. Dersu was sitting on the earth, clutching his chest, much as though trying to stop his heart from beating. The Udehei lay sprawled motionless in the snow.

For a few seconds I could not grasp what had occurred and what I was supposed to do. I chased the dog off my chest, climbed out of the bag, and approached Dersu.

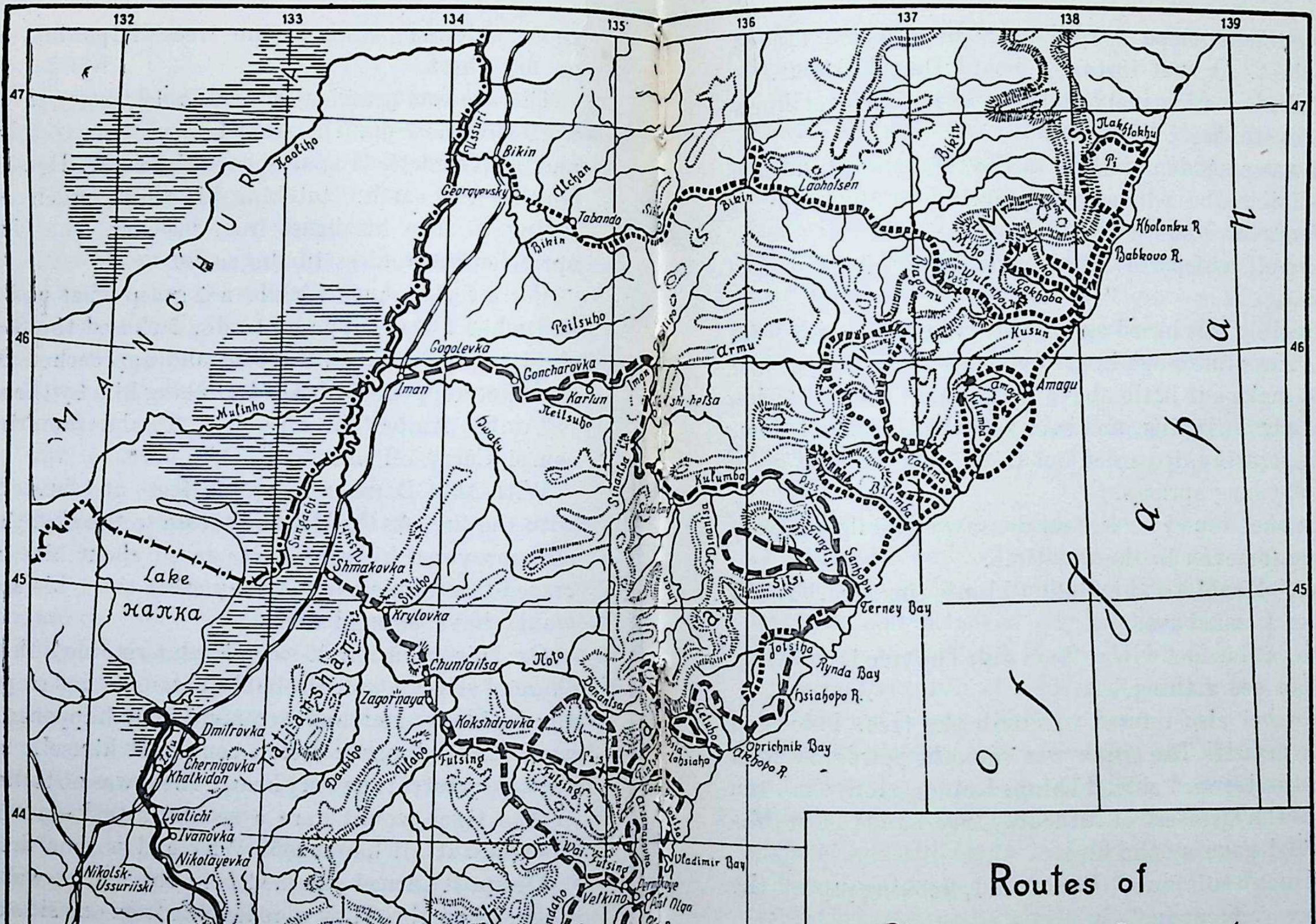
"What happened?" I asked, shaking him by the shoulder.

"Amba, Amba!" he screeched. "Amba come inside our camp! Carry off one dog!"

With this Dersu rose to his feet and busied himself with the fire. As the flames shot up to the sky, the Udehei also recovered his senses. He gazed about him, a look of crazed fear in his eyes. At any other time, his appearance would have amused me.

On this occasion it was I who retained the greatest share of self-control. Probably because I had slept through the incident, and had not seen what happened. But we soon changed parts: Dersu composed himself, and I felt cold fear clutching at my heart. There was no telling whether the tiger would dare a second attack—on one of us. How had it all happened? Why had no one fired?

Dersu, it turned out, had been the first to wake up: the dogs roused him. They were leaping from one side of the fire to the other. Fleeing from the tiger, Alpa leaped on Dersu's head. He pushed her away in his sleep and then glimpsed the tiger within reach of himself. The beast seized the little native tike and carried it off, unhurriedly, aware that no one could hinder its getaway. Frightened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MANCHURIA
Sea of Japan
Kaoliho
Mulinho
Lake
Hanka
Ussuri
Bikin
Georgyevsky
Alchan
Tabando
Laoholsen
Peilsuho
Gogolevka
Goncharovka
Karlun
Iman
Armu
Kulumba
Sungach
Shmakovka
Silubo
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Olga Bay
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Oprichnik Bay
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Tadusha
Rynda Bay
Hsiahopo R.
Jotsiho
Terney Bay
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Kusun
Dakhoba
Kholonku R.
Babkovo R.
Pi
Naktakhu
Tatianshan
Daubiho
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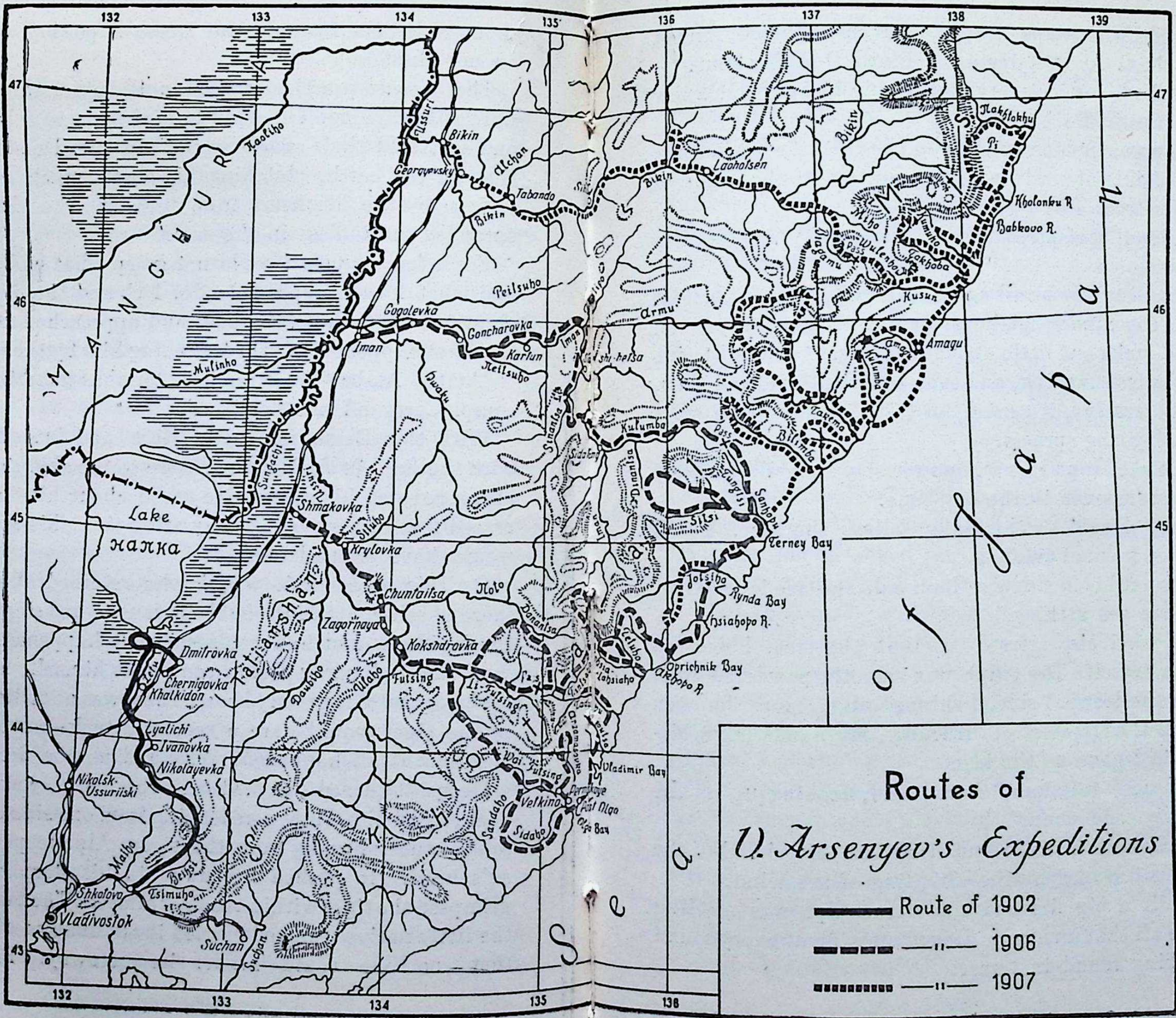
## Routes of

## V. Arsenyev's Expeditions

Route of 1902
—"— 1906
—"— 1907


Routes of V. Arsenyev's Expeditions

Route of 1902
1906
1907
MANCHURIA
Sea of Japan
Lake Hanka
Vladivostok
Shkolovo
Tsimuho
Maiho
Beihsi
Suchan
Nikolsk-Ussuriiski
Nikolayevka
Ivanovka
Lyalichi
Khalkidon
Chernigovka
Dmitrovka
Lefu
Tatianshan
Daubiho
Ulaho
Fulsing
Li-Fulsing
Wai-Fulsing
Kokshárovka
Zagornaya
Chuntailsa
Noto
Krylovka
Shmakovka
Situbo
Sungachi
Ussuri
Iman
Gogolevka
Goncharovka
Karlun
Nellsuho
Hwaku
Mulinho
Naoliho
Georgyevsky
Bikin
Alchan
Tabando
Peilsuho
Armu
Laoholsen
Kulumba
Sidaku
Dinantsa
Sitsi
Sanhoku
Terney Bay
Jotsiho
Rynda Bay
Hsiahopo R.
Oprichnik Bay
Akhopo R.
Tadusha
Vladimir Bay
Port Olga
Olga Bay
Velkino
Sidabo
Sandabo
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out of her wits, Alpa leaped over the fire and landed on my chest. At that instant I heard Dersu's shout.

I snatched instinctively at my rifle but did not know which way to fire.

There was a sudden rustling in the thickets behind me.

"Here!" Kitenbu whispered, pointing to the right of the cedar-tree.

"No, here!" whispered Dersu, pointing in the opposite direction.

The rustling was heard again, this time from both sides at once. The wind rough-housed among the tree-tops, and we could make out little above its noise. It seemed to me I heard twigs snapping, and even saw the tiger, and then, on closer scrutiny, it turned out to be a fallen tree or a cluster of young spruces.

The thicket round us was so dense we should scarcely have seen far even in the day-time.

"Dersu," I said to the Gold, "climb the tree. You'll see better from above."

But he put his foot down: "I am old. The tree is swaying. I shall not see a thing."

The Udehei also refused to climb the tree. I decided to go up myself. The trunk was smooth, powdered with snow on the leeward side. I shinned up no more than ten feet with the greatest of difficulty, my hands froze bitterly, and I gave up the idea.

"Don't need to climb," Dersu said, looking up at the sky. "Day come soon."

He picked up his rifle and fired into the air. But the report was drowned by the whistling of the wind.

We built a big fire and made tea. Alpa was nestling up to me all the time, or to Dersu, starting at every sound and looking round in terror.

We sat about for some forty minutes, discussing our narrow escape.

At last day began to dawn. The darkness resolved into dim, dusky shadows, the stars dimmed, as if receding somewhere into the depths of the sky. Very soon a blood-red dawn coloured the east. The wind died down and the cold increased. Dersu and Kitenbu scrutinized the thickets. They examined the tracks and determined that nine boars had passed by us and that the tiger was a large specimen, a veteran. It had circled the bivouac for a long time and had apparently attacked the dog only when the fire died down.

I suggested leaving the things behind and following the beast. Dersu, instead of refusing as I expected, agreed readily.

He said the taiga provided the tiger with an abundance of food and it had had no business attacking human beings. It had been stalking the boars, but had sighted people in its path and attacked our bivouac instead.

"No sin to kill such Amba," he concluded.

We had a snack of cold meat, drank tea, put on skis and set out along the tiger track.

The windstorm was over. The old spruces and cedars had shed their garments of white, but there were snowdrifts on the ground. The rays of the sun flitted over their surface, and the forest looked bright and festive.

The tiger retraced its steps from the bivouac and its tracks brought us to a pile of dead-wood.

"Don't hurry, captain," Dersu cautioned. "No use going straight. Must go round and look properly."

We skirted the wind-fallen trees.

"He's gone!" Dersu shouted suddenly and quickly picked up a new track.

It was evident that the tiger had been sitting on one spot for a long time. The snow had melted under its weight. It had put down the dog and had apparently listened to the pursuit. Then it had gone on.

We marched in its tracks for three hours.

The tiger's course was not straight. It picked its way where the thickets were denser, where there was more dead-wood and the snow was less deep. On one occasion it stood for some time upon a wind-fallen tree, and then, frightened by something, jumped to earth and crawled several yards on its belly. From time to time it stopped and listened. As we came closer it retreated, first in leaps, then at a walk, and finally at a trot.

Dersu consulted the Udehei. He thought we should give up the chase, because the tiger was unhurt, the snow was not deep enough to impede its escape and pursuit was senseless.

I could not understand why the tiger had not eaten the dog and was dragging it along. Dersu said it was a tigress, and that the dog was meant for its cubs. It would lead us a merry chase over hill and dale until we should give up, he said, and would never show us the way to its den.

We decided to turn back. Dersu shouted:

"Amba! You have no face. You are a thief, worse than a dog. I'm not afraid of you. Next time I see you, I shoot you dead."

Then he lit his pipe and picked up the trail back to camp.

As we approached our encampment I happened to be somewhat ahead of the others and, on scaling the pass, saw something scurry downhill from our bivouac. A minute later we were back in camp.

Our things were scattered in disorder on the ground and my sleeping-bag was in tatters. The tracks in the snow showed the culprits to be a pair of gluttons. We salvaged what we could, and started on our return trip. Walking downhill was easy. The ski tracks, though powdered with new snow, were solid. We kept up a comfortable pace and joined the rest of our group before evening.

Near the Sigonku cliffs we came to an Udehei encampment. We were told there that a search was in progress on the Bikin, and that the local police officer had joined in it, but had turned back owing to the deep snow. I had no inkling at the time that the search had anything to do with me. According to the Udeheis, there were two empty yurts some distance away, and I decided to spend a day in them.

"Where are they?" I asked.

"At Bei-si-Datana," one of them replied.

"How many versts?" asked Zakharov.

"Two," the Udehei said, and volunteered to guide us there. We bought elk meat from the Udeheis, and some fish and bear's fat, and went on. After two miles I asked the guide how far we still had to go.

"Near," he replied.

But we made another three miles without sighting the encampment. It was high time to call a halt, but it seemed a shame to make camp in the snow and spend the night in the open with the yurts somewhere in the vicinity. The Udehei kept saying that they were near, very near.

I expected to see them behind every successive river bend, every promontory, but in vain. It struck me at last to ask our guide how many versts it was to the yurts, and he said seven in a firm voice.

The men stopped and began to curse. It turned out that the Udehei had no idea of versts. The natives measure distances in terms of time—half a day, a day, two or three days, etc.

I called a halt. The Udehei kept insisting that the yurts were a stone's throw away, but nobody believed him. The men shovelled the snow away, gathered fire-food, and pitched tents. We were late, and darkness descended before the bivouac was ready. But we made it very cosy.

Next day a little episode occurred which grieved Dersu but was a source of amusement to the rest of us.

I had a great many trifles in my bag—crayons, a penknife, a rubber, needles and thread, an awl, a watch and a stop-watch, etc. Some of my things, an ink-bottle among them, I gave Dersu to carry. After midday he came running to me in distress and said anxiously that he had lost....

"What?" I asked.

He hemmed and hawed. I saw he was in difficulties over the right Russian word.

"What did you lose?" I repeated my question.

"Blue water," he replied in embarrassment.

There was no word such as "ink" in his vocabulary, and he had no idea how to call it.

My companions burst into laughter. He thought we were laughing over his clumsiness and assured me profusely that he had kept a watchful eye on the "blue water." Some words, he declared, come from the mouth of men and fill the air around him. Other words are bottled. They sit on the paper and can go very far. The former are soon lost, while the latter can live a hundred and more years. He, Dersu, should not have been charged with the miraculous "blue water," because he had no idea how to treat it properly.

The last day of 1907 we marched to Sigou (the Western Valley), the most densely populated point on the Bikin.

The population was exclusively Chinese. They slaughtered a pig and insisted that I spend the next day with them. Our food supplies were running low and the prospect of celebrating New Year's in relatively civilized surroundings was extremely tempting. I accepted the invitation, but made my men promise that they would not drink more than was good for them. They kept their word.

The next day was bright and frosty. I assembled my crew early in the morning, toasted all who were instrumental in equipping our expedition, and concluded by thanking my men for exemplary service. The wind carried their "hurrahs" far afield. The Chinese left their fanzas and joined in the merriment with rattles and fire-crackers. And as we sat down to our holiday dinner, we heard bells tinkling. A few Chinese came running to the fanza with news that the police officer had arrived. A few minutes later a man in a clumsy fur coat rolled into the room, turning out to be Merzlyakov. After the greetings, he told us it was he (and not the police officer) who had gone in search of us, but had been obliged to postpone his trip owing to the deep snow.

## 30. THE DEATH OF DERSU

We arrived in Khabarovsk in the evening of January 7. The men returned to their units, while Dersu and I went home, where my closest friends had gathered to welcome us.

They looked at Dersu with a mingling of curiosity and surprise. He was out of his element and long could not grow accustomed to his new life.

I let him have a small room, and furnished it with a bed, a table and two chairs. He had no use for the latter, however, preferring to sit on the floor or, more frequently, on the bed, his legs tucked under him in Turkish fashion. Through force of habit he put his old goatskin over the mattress and woollen blanket when he went to sleep.

He had a favourite spot near the stove. Sitting on the logs, he would gaze for hours into the flames. The room and everything in it was alien to him, only the burning logs, it seemed, reminded him of the taiga. And whenever the fire-wood would not burn properly, he would fret and say:

"Bad people, they don't burn right."

Sometimes I would sit with him and we would recount episodes of our journeys. The palavers were a constant source of pleasure both to him and myself.

One time I took it into my head to record Dersu's speech with a phonograph. He was quick to grasp what was wanted of him and narrated a long tale, which took up almost the entire cylinder. Later Dersu heard his speech played back to him, but showed no signs of surprise. His face was a blank. He listened attentively to the end and then said, pointing to the phonograph:

"He speak right. Didn't miss a single word."

The incorrigible Dersu, faithful to his world outlook, endowed the phonograph with the qualities of a human being.

There is always much work to be done on returning from an expedition. I had to draw up expense accounts and reports, replot our routes, arrange my collections, etc. Dersu noted that I spent whole days at my desk, writing.

"I think before," he said, "that captain sits like this," and he showed how, to his mind, a captain should sit:

"eats, judges people, and does nothing more. Now I understand: captain goes to mountains—and works; comes back to town—and works also. No time to sit idle."

One day on entering his room I found him in his outdoor garb. He had his rifle in his hands.

"Where are you going?" I asked.

"To shoot," he replied simply, and noticing my surprise, ne said dirt had gathered in the barrel of his gun. He would fire, and the bullet would sweep out the accumulated dust; he would then only have to wipe the barrel with a rag.

It was a discouraging revelation to him that shooting within the city limits was prohibited. He fingered his gun for a bit, heaved a deep sigh, and put it back again in its corner. For some reason he was deeply troubled.

Next day, when passing by Dersu's room, I found the door open. I walked in quietly, without any intention to take him by surprise, and found him standing by the window, mumbling under his breath. People who spend years in the taiga grow accustomed to expressing their thoughts aloud.

"Dersu," I said.

He turned round. His lips were drawn in a bitter smile.

"What is it?" I asked.

"Oh, nothing," he replied. "I sit here like a duck. How can people live in a box?" He pointed to the walls and ceiling of his room. "People must go to mountains and shoot."

He fell silent, turned to the window again, and gazed out into the street. He was mourning his lost freedom. "It'll be all right," I thought. "He'll grow accustomed to it with time."

One day some minor repairs had to be made in his room. I wanted his stove mended and the walls repainted. I told him to move to my study, promising him that in a day or two he would have his room back.

"Never mind, captain," he said. "I can sleep in street: make tent, and fire, and disturb nobody."

He thought nothing of his notion, and it took me quite some time to talk him out of it. He was not offended, but greatly displeased with the frustrations of city life.

Then, one day, he saw me pay a merchant for a cartload of fire-wood.

"Ah," he shouted, "plenty of wood in the forest. Why pay money for nothing?"

He abused the merchant, calling him a "bad man," and tried to convince me that I had been cheated. All my efforts to explain that I was not paying for the wood so much as for the labour of delivering it, came to nothing. He could not compose himself for hours and that evening refused to light the stove. Next day he went off to the woods himself for fire-wood, so as to spare me the expense, but was stopped by the police on his way back. He protested in his own way, created a disturbance, and had to be dragged off to the station. I had to settle the issue with the chief of police.

Back home, I tried to explain to him why trees should not be tampered with near towns and cities, but it was all too deep for him. The affair preyed on his mind. It dawned on him that in cities people did not live the way they wanted to, but the way others wanted them to live. An alien, frustrating world surrounded him. The old man began to shun people, lost weight, and seemed to age visibly.

The next incident upset his balance altogether. He saw me pay for water.

"What!" he shouted again. "Must also pay for water? Look at the river." He pointed to the Amur. "Plenty of water there. Earth, water, air—God granted free of charge. How can?"

Words failed him; he pressed his hands to his face, and retired to his room.

In the evening I was in my study, writing. I heard the door open, and turned round. It was Dersu. He was confused and troubled, and dropped to his knees imploringly.

"Captain! Please let me go to mountains. I cannot live in city: wood must buy, water must buy, people very angry if I cut trees."

I led him to a chair.

"Where will you go?" I asked.

"There," he said, pointing to the distant blue of the Khekhtsir Ridge.

I did not like the idea of parting with Dersu, but had no right to hold him. I made him promise, however, that he would return within the month. We would then go together to the Ussuri, where I meant to put him up with the family of a native friend.

I reckoned that Dersu would spend another day or two with me before departing, and planned to givehim a supply of money, food and clothing.

But next morning, passing by Dersu's room, I found it empty.

Dersu's departure weighed heavily on my mind. Something snapped in my chest. A kind of painful premonition, an uncertain fear, possessed me. I had an unhappy sense of loss. I was afraid, afraid to distraction that I would never see him again. Greatly troubled, I could not do a stroke of work that day and went out into the open.

It was spring. The snow was melting. It turned a dirty grey, as though powdered with soot. In the snow-drifts were thin films of ice, which melted during the day and froze again overnight. Water ran down the gutters. It gurgled merrily, hastening to promise each blade of withered grass that it was back on the job and would see to it that nature would be well watered.

People who came back from the fields told me they had seen a man with a gun and a knapsack on his back. He was walking cheerfully, putting his best leg foremost, singing a song. The description fitted Dersu.

About a fortnight later I received a telegram. It said: "Your man found murdered in taiga."

I recalled giving Dersu my visiting card so the police would not bother him. On the back of it I had written who he was, and that he lived with me. The card was probably found on the corpse, and that was why the telegram was addressed to me.

Next day I took a train to Korfovskaya, a station south of the Khekhtsir Ridge. I learned there that some workers had seen Dersu in the forest. He had his rifle, and was talking to a crow perched in the branches of a tree.

Since I arrived late, I decided to go to the place of the occurrence early next morning. I lost my sleep. Grief clutched at my heart. A close friend had gone from me. We had been through thick and thin with him. He had often disregarded his own safety to extricate me out of dangerous situations.

I tried reading a book to distract myself, but it was no use. Dersu stood before my eyes all the time, the Dersu who that fateful day pleaded with me to let him go.

I blamed myself for bringing him to town. But how could I have known that it would all end this way?

Next morning I left the house with a friend at about nine. It was late March. The sun stood high in the sky, caressing the earth with its bright rays. There was still the chill of the night's frost in the air, particularly in the shade, but the melting snows, the water in the brooks, and the bright, cheerful look of the trees—all spoke of triumphant spring-time.

A narrow path brought us to the taiga. It was a long walk, and we kept silent all the way. To the right of the path I finally glimpsed a fire and three people round it. One of them was the local police officer. Two workers were digging a grave, and a body lay upon the cold earth, covered with matting. I recognized Dersu by the familiar boots.

"Dersu! Dersu!" I shouted involuntarily.

The workers looked up in surprise. I did not want to give rein to my feelings in the presence of strangers, walked some distance away, sat down on a stump, and gave myself up to my grief.

The earth was frozen, and the workers had made a fire to warm it. Five minutes later the police officer came up to me. He looked revoltingly happy and self-satisfied. Perhaps he had handled many such corpses in his day and was inured to it; and perhaps the corpse of an unknown "native" was of little consequence. At any rate, I could see by the expression in his face that he would not trouble himself with looking for the murderers, and would merely draw up a death certificate. He told me Dersu was found murdered by the side of a campfire. To all appearances he was killed in his sleep. The murderers had looked for money on his person, and had carried off his gun.

In about two hours the grave was ready. The men came up to Dersu and pulled off the matting. A sunbeam, breaking through the dense foliage, fell upon the earth and illuminated the dead man's face. It had changed little. His open eyes were fixed on the sky, creating the impression that he was trying to recall something. The workers lowered him into the grave and cast earth upon him.

"Farewell, Dersu," I said softly. "Born in the woods, you have gone back to them."

A mound rose over the spot where the Gold's corpse had been lowered into the cold earth twenty minutes before.

Their job done, the workers lit their pipes, picked up their tools, and walked away towards the station on the heels of the police officer. I sat down on the bare earth by the roadside, thinking about my deceased friend.

Pictures of the past rose in my mind. A nuthatch perched on a near-by shrub, looked at me, and chirped trustingly.

I recalled that Dersu had described the feathered taiga dwellers as "quiet people." The little bird took wing and flew into the shrubbery. Sorrow welled up again in my heart.

"Farewell, Dersu!" I said for the last time and walked down the path to the station.

In the summer of 1908 I set out on my third journey, which lasted two years.

In the winter of 1910, when I returned to Khabarovsk, I went to Korfovskaya to visit the grave of my dear friend. But everything had changed. A new settlement had sprung up near the station. There was a stone quarry in the Khekhtsir foothills; woodcutters were busy in the taiga, cutting railway sleepers. I made several futile attempts to find Dersu's grave. The cedars that I had memorized as landmarks, were gone. There were new roads, new embankments, pits, mounds, ravines and craters.

Farewell, Dersu

В. К. АРСЕНЬЕВ

# ДЕРСУ УЗАЛА

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Maxim Gorky said of this unusual narrative:

"I read your book with uncommon delight, to say nothing of its scientific worth, which is of course unquestionable and impressive. I am fascinated and swept away by its expressive impact. You have succeeded in rolling Beöhm and Fenimore Cooper all into one, and that, believe me, is no small praise..."

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Vladimir Arsenyev (1872-1930) is a well-known explorer of the Far East, an eminent traveller, ethnographer and writer. In a series of expeditions to the Ussuri taiga he studied that rich virginal territory of Russia. In 1906-1907 and 1908-1910 he explored the mountainous regions of the Sikhota-alin, which, until then, had been a "white spot" on the map. He wrote 62 scientific papers and travelogues. The best known are *Through Ussuri Territory*, *Dersu Uzala*, *In the Mountains of the Sikhota-alin* and *Across the Taiga*.

1852